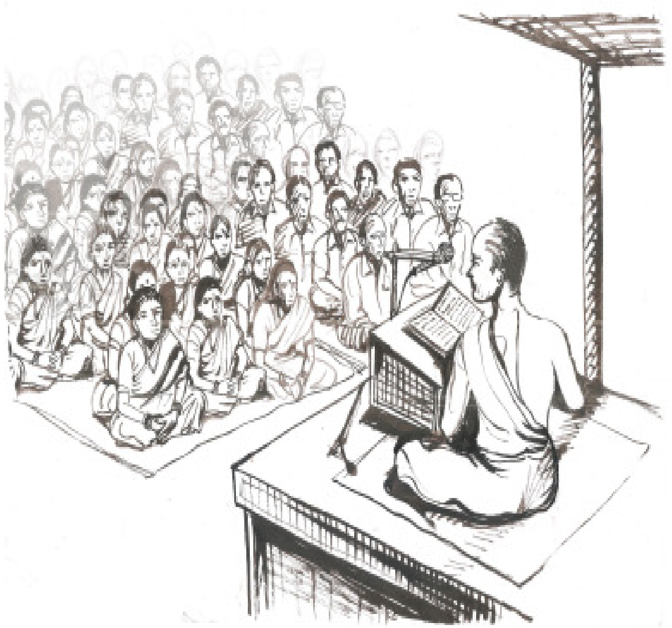
TREAD THE PATH OF DHARMA



A compilation of religious discourses delivered over a period of years

2010

TREAD THE PATH OF DHARMA

A compilation of religious discourses delivered over a period of years

Sri Cultural and Educational Foundation
Chennai

2010

Dedicated to

All *Acharya Purushas* who by their thought, word and deed inspire men to adhere to the path of *Dharma*

TREAD THE PATH OF DHARMA

(A compilation of Religious Discourses delivered over a period of years)

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The inspiration for this compilation goes back to 1970. At a meeting of important RSS workers held at Perambur near Chennai the then Chief of RSS Sri Guruji Golwalkar was trying to explain the audience the global mission of India offering an alternative pattern of life based on the four fold values of life (i.e. Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha). While elaborating the point he asked how many in the audience read The Hindu news paper regularly. Many raised their hands with enthusiasm. He further asked as to how many go through the religious column appearing in the same highlighting vital aspects of dharmic life. Not many replied in the affirmative. He then expressed his appreciation for the service rendered by the paper for a noble cause and urged the audience to go through the column without fail.

Bearing this in mind a compilation of select discourses was made during the birth centenary year of Shri Guruji (2005-06) and it is now brought in the form of a book. The book is published by the Sri Cultural and Educational Foundation, a voluntary body functioning in memory of Sri R.Srinivasan

(Former Principal of Vidya Mandhir, Mylapore) and other dedicated teachers who lived upto the ideals found in these discourses.

In this initiative Sri S.Swaminathan (Retd. Deputy Registrar of Co op.Societies) helped us in compiling the discourses, Ms. Pradipa helped us in typesetting the articles, Mrs. Vijayadurga Sivakumar went through the proof, Sri Gandhi favoured us with the illustration and Sri Karunakaran got it printed neatly. We remain grateful to all of them.

The Publisher's efforts will be amply rewarded if this compilation kindles an aspiration in the hearts of even a few to lead a life based on Dharma.]

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> The noblest work is to cultivate the soul
>
> - Sadhu T.L. Vaswani

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1. Religion that is secular in character

Religion, which is eternal, is the property of all people. Any attempt to remove its influence from the masses will be only an exercise in futility. Whether one likes it or not, it is soaked in every individual and cannot be removed from him. For instance, one comes across a pavement dweller or a daily wage-earner getting out of the bed and worshipping even a brick to which he or she applies some vermillion powder. Foe such persons it serves as a symbol of God and as the supreme power.

What is relevant to Hinduism is the basic faith entertained by all that God will certainly come to the succour of those who believes in Him. The intellectuals however visit temples or study scriptural texts and derive the benefit. The world cannot thrive even for a second without religious activity in some way or the other.

The common factor in all religions is the belief that there exists in it Transcendental Truth., acceptable by all and applicable to all. This idea will continue to be entertained foe all time to come. The purpose of religion is the creation of Divine consciousness.

In a lecture, Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar said, Hinduism is secular in character giving scope for everyone to follow any of the numerous Gods, before him, in any manner he likes. Vedic religion dine into us that all religions should be honoured.

The Atharva Veda points out that there is only one God though He has many forms and there are different paths to reach Him. This is spelt out even in

Bhagavad Gita though Lord Krishna ultimately declares that He alone should be approached.

Hindus are catholic in their outlook as evidenced by the fact that they offer worship in all temples. They desire that unity should be maintained. Is it not a wonder that Aiyappa cult has spread. No one compelled people to adopt this type of worship.

The Yadhava were firmly attached to Lord Krishna while devotees in Ayodhya and elsewhere swore only the name of Sri Rama but they do not come into conflict with each other.

The basic feature is unity in diversity. It is a secular religion whose tenets, upheld by all, has to be, "the unity fostered by it maintained, the common factor promoted and the Divinity in each Hindu deity accepted". **(Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar)**

2. Bereft of religion, an endless road

Why do we need religion? Will not man survive without it? These questions may arise in many among us. It is possible for men to survive without religion. But the vital factor to be remembered is, in that case, a person will be taking a trip down an endless road. It is very important for a traveller to use a map or a guide while undertaking a journey. Religion serves this role when a human being during his brief existence will require such a help and religion fills the gap as a map or a guide to travel on the vast unknown road of life and reach the destination safely. Otherwise, he will be lost in wilderness. Religion strengthens man's character, and provides him with a code of conduct for his safe voyage in his life.

But religion cannot be thrust on anyone. A person has to accept it with his heart and follow the rules laid down in the charter of duties so as to avoid

pitfalls and reach his goal. Another valid doubt may crop as to the future of religion in this materialistic world. Will it be necessary in the context of the fantastic changes which are now taking place? The answer is that religion matters very much even now because all scientific ideas can be obtained from religious books available. Science and religion go together and in all his inventions and his leaps forward, man reposes his faith in God. When something happens against his expectations, he kneels before God with his prayers. Man may be seen moving more towards religion in his search of God.

Religion has been defined as "all actions and thoughts, concerned with our belief in and prayers to God" and its important constituent is belief in His powers. It need not be blind faith or zealotry. Religion refers to the continuous process of gathering knowledge and updating it periodically. The power exercised by men of religion can be felt in the world. However, there appears to be some confusion among people as to which religion is the best. Instead of quarreling over this, each one should try to practise respective religions in the best way possible.

In a lecture, Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji explained how religion can change man's mind and the best example is that of Valmiki, author of the Ramayana, who was a robber but got chastened by the teachings of Sage Narada. The insatiable thirst of knowledge of a Muslim king, who was a descendent from a line of rulers known for their intolerance, led to the birth of a new religion. To those who believe in the existence of a superior force guiding their destiny, there is no necessity to convince about God's presence. To those who refuses to believe in God, any amount of explanation will be of no avail.

(Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji)

3. Vedas relevant for all ages

The holy utterances and the foundation for Hindu religion, termed the Vedas, are unique in that the revelations therein are not only relevant for all ages but they have raised several doubts which a commoner may harbour within him and have provided suitable and valid explanations. They are classified as exoteric and esoteric., the former dealing with the ceremonial acts and the latter with the acquisition of spiritual knowledge.

It may surprise the atheist who questions the existence of God and the significance of rituals, that more than 2,000 identical queries had been raised in the Vedas. Of what purpose is the offer of oblations in sacrificial fire and what is the guarantee that they reach the concerned – the usual challenge thrown by many –have been answered convincingly. The token of offerings multiply themselves when handed over through the medium of fire (agni) even as a few seedlings sown in a tiny field result in a bumper harvest.

The Vedas were recited, in days of yore, to ensure the prosperity of citizens, Scholars did not chant them for personal gains alone. God provided them with what they needed. The three monthly showers which used to regularly pour, were intended to honour the Vedic pandits, the rulers who administered the kingdom efficiently and to women of chastity.

With faith in the Vedic rituals, emperor Dasaratha, who had no child, —conducted a sacrifice, invoking divine blessings. Contemporaneously, celestial appealed to the Lord to descend to the world and save the pious who were being tortured by evil forces.

In his discourse Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasinhachariar said God was born as Sri Rama to establish moral order.

(Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasinhachariar)

4. Violation of Dharma angers God

The prosperity enjoyed by some and the agony experienced by others, make devotees wonder whether God showers His compassion only on those whom He likes and is unkind to those who incur His displeasure. These sceptics should just analyse the causes that make God appear to be angry towards some and dislikes them, the reason lies only with the people themselves, because of their defiance of the directives given by Him. God has prescribed a Constitution for mankind and if its laws are violated, naturally He will be unhappy. Hence people should not blame the Almighty for their own defaults; if so, they can be likened to youngsters who, refusing to be disciplined, not attending to their study and disobeying their parents, complain that the latter are not favourably disposed towards them.

In a discourse, Sri Abhinava Vidya Thirtha, Sringeri Sankaracharya said every man, to the extent possible and with sincerity, should follow the injunctions contained in the Sastras. He should abide by Law of Dharma, undertake to carry out the specific duties enjoined upon him and refrain from doing prohibited acts. For this, he should know what constitutes Dharma and what Adharma means. What is good for him and what is to be abjured as evil and vice are laid down in scriptural texts. One of man's essential duties is to respect his aged parents and attend to their comforts instead of neglecting them, considering them as a burden. For this, certain rites and austerities ought to be conducted by him, daily

and on specified occasions, certain deeds are to be practiced, like helping a brilliant but poor student. All his acts should be considered as a dedication to God. **(Sri Abhinava Vidya Thirtha)**

5. The four Vedic commandments

Even at the dawn of Indian history, the familiar questions used to be. "Who is God" and "Is He visible and perceivable?"

The Vedas—Divine utterances annotated by sages with reference to specific contexts—provide the answer. It is possible to experience God, the seers have assured, provided man becomes really human, shedding the beastly traits in him. In this connection, the following four commandments have been given priority: worship your mother ; revere your father ; obey your spiritual mentor ; and honour your guest ; If all these are observed scrupulously, they will certainly enable one to have the vision of god.

The prime dedication should go to the mother, who has delivered us into the world. "She is a veritable God." Next is the father who tends us. The spiritual guide, the third in order, removes our ignorance, imparts knowledge and shows the path of God realisation. The Acharya, however should distinguish himself by the basic qualifications—desirelessness and total detachment. Even God, donning the robes of mortals bowed before Gurus. Then comes the true guest ; he is one who remains indebted to the host for his hospitality. Lord Krishna chose to stay with the humble Vidhura instead of with the pompous Duryodhana as it would compel Him to be ever grateful to him. The difference between the two was while Vidhura told the Lord, "It is your house, please enter, "the haughty Duryodhana said, "Come to my palace."

Sri N. Giridhari Prasad, in his discourse referred to the Nayanmaras, the Azhwars and others who have worshipped God as mother or father or both, as revealed in their outpourings.

Sri Rama, the ideal son, sacrificed an empire and smilingly retired to the forest to spend 14 years there, implicitly obeying His father. Another inimitable character in the scriptures was Bhisma who remained a celibate till his death to enable his father to re-marry and enjoy worldly pleasures.

(Sri N. Giridhari Prasad)

6. Puranas explain Veda dictum

Our noble religious traditions, the hoary heritage and the rich cultural background are based on the Vedas. But they are terse in nature and are not easily assimilable by the comman man. The privilege of removing the unwanted matter from this huge pile of truth was granted to sage Vyasa., who dedicated the 18 Puranas and other works to enable humanity to follow the guidelines in the Vedas. Some people may ask whether the Puranas are needed at all and whether they have any relevance now since their very name suggests their antiquity. Even as the watch repairer needs a magnifying glass to examine the delicate mechanism inside or the diamond merchant to spot out the blemishes in the gems, the Puranas amplify the contents of the Vedas.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse referred to the analogy given by poet Kamban (who wrote the Tamil adaptation of the Ramayana) that Vyasa removed the "riddles" in the Vedas even as Sri Sita carefully separated the strands of Her coiffeur which got matted owing to lack of attention during Her ten-month captivity. The Vedas give a command "Satyam vada" – Utter the Truth. But this requires an

elaboration and commentary. Vyasa's contribution to this was by way of writing the Harischandra Purana wherein the significance and import of the above dictum are explained. A king who accepted the challenge that he would never utter a lie had to undergo unimaginable ordeals. He refused to speak anything contrary to his words even when he was grilled to such an extent that he was about to collapse. So too was another king Nala who was driven to the situation of working as a syce. Similarly in the Ramayana, the poet describes the state of terror which Sri Sita experienced because of Ravana's threat. She never slept all the ten months- the poet says, a description that defies imagination. But annotated properly, Her agony could be compared to a person who is asked to sleep in a room with all modern comforts but is gently reminded that a cobra may enter the room by one window and make its exit by another during the night. Can the man have his rest? **(Sri Kripanandavariar)**

7. Preservation of our culture vital

The fact that the Vedic revelations have survived the tides of time so long testifies to some divine phenomenon catering to the material and spiritual aspirations of the people. Institutions engaged in the analytical study of these divine statements have been fascinated by the wealth of information, touching all aspects of society as well as human behaviour. Digging into the mine of Vedic knowledge has resulted in unearthing several secrets which the scientific talent has discovered at a later stage.

It may surprise many to know that a reference to the atom and nuclear fission is contained in this treasure of ancient wisdom. Generations of scholars who studied God's utterances, have provided details of various truths embedded in them in Sanskrit. It is a

misfortune that the Divine language is now being described as a 'dead' one. On the other hand, since it has eternal value and relevance, it should be called 'never dying' one. The Divine revelations were rendered in Tamil by subsequent masters and this language is compared to 'honey'.

Sanskrit and Tamil have been given equal importance by our forbears who considered them as the eyes of a person. Apart from integrating all parts of the country, they brought out the hidden values. In their outpourings, apostles have rendered the translations of these Divine revelations and hence people vied with one another in mastering both the languages. There has been a gradual decline in the standards of spoken Tamil but in its pure state, this language, particularly in the written style was admirable. The Saiva Agama and the Pancharatra and other texts spelling out the systems of spiritual knowledge reflect the glory of these two languages.

Explaining how town planning in ancient days received society's attention.

Sri Andavan Swami in a discourse said, an ancient Tamil text compared the formation of a city to that of a lotus with its central stalk surrounded by eight petals and containing the pollen grains, a few within and some fallen down. They represent the central portion of the city, the streets, the houses and human beings.

Likewise, the texts mention about the natural smell of Mothe Earth. Granite dug out of it may not give any smell but when powdered, these will emanate a fragrance. The Mahabharata reveals how a Tamil emperor supplied food for the army engaged in the Kurukshetra battle. The works of Kalidas and Chanakya provide enormous details about cultural ethos and political sagacity. Samudragupta's strategy

in war bewilders one. It is hence necessary to preserve the sanctity of these two eyes and bring out, through research, more vital facts governing the State and the society. **(Sri Andavan Swami)**

8. Material pursuits enslave man

All human endeavors can be broadly classified into two types of pursuits. The constant struggle to procure things of the material world, maintaining and using them, and totally dependent on them is the kind of existence which we commonly see in man's life. This is known as 'Preyas'.

The other is the pursuit of 'Sreyas', when realizing the futility of leading a life dependent on comforts which only enslave man, efforts are made to overcome dependence on material things. This independence can be achieved through the process of Self-discovery. By discovering on worldly objects and it's liberated from bondage.

Here we have to learn to differentiate between using a material object when it is available and the process of becoming totally dependent on it. A life of Preyas is one when man becomes subservient to material things and a life of Sreyas is one in which he continues to lead a life in the world, but in total freedom, without becoming servile to material needs. This distinction in man's life hinges on the discovery of the Self.

Scriptures deal with both these aspects of man's life and the primary scripture are the Vedas which are four in number. Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The Purva (beginning) portion of the Vedas explain the manner in which the self can be discovered. The Vedas have been elaborated in the Smiriti texts, the Puranas and the Itihasas.

In his lecture Swami Paramarthananda said, the Vedas do not enforce anything on man. They elaborately deal with both the ends that can be pursued and leave the choice to man. Man has the freedom to lead a life as he chooses. i..e, whether to pursue a materialistic existence and remain engrossed in it or choose the goal of liberation which give him freedom from the shackles of bondage.

The scriptures have been elucidated and commented upon by the Acharyas and they have all written treatises in their respective traditions giving in succinct form the scriptural teachings. The glory of the tradition of Adi Sankara lies in its teaching of attaining liberation while living in the world. Among the works Sankara has written, the Tattvabodha is a prose work giving the quintessence of Vedanta.

Sankara in this work mentions that the two factors of self-effort and Divine grace must go hand in hand for success in any human enterprise. One cannot bank on Providence to achieve something. Likewise God's grace is necessary to bring our efforts to fruition.
(Swami Paramarthananda)

9. Real intention of Upanishads

Constantly battered by baffling problems, it is understandable that a man gets disconsolate and wants to run away from this world, least aware that this is not the way to escape from them. He will not be concerned by the frustrating experience if he realise that he has no independence of his own and that there is an unseen Divine force that guides his destiny. He is like a bullock yoked to the cart, the nose-string held from behind. The animal never complains of any discomfort even should there be some but goes on with its job. If a person adopts this attitude that all his acts

are God-ordained and carries out his tasks unmindful of the hazards and as a dedication to the Almighty, he will not feel the burden.

When he is asked to discard desire, it is possible to mistake the Hindu philosophy as being negative in its approach. But the real intention of the Upanishad's injunction is to make us remain absolutely contended with what has been provided and not feel dissatisfied with what has not been granted but possessed by others. The desire for an object again depends on the attitude- for instance, akin to the view held by a child when looking at a charming woman and that of a youth. In just two words, the two vistas to reach Godhead have been described by Vivekananda – pravritti and nivritti margas –broadly indicating the duties to be performed here in this life and the steps to be taken to become sprituaally enlightened through study of texts to serve hereafter in the Kingdom of God. In the midst of one's daily activities, one can still uphold the rules of righteousness, perform worship and take to meditation but dedicating the fruits to God. There is no need to seek total renunciation.

Sri Agnihotra Ramanuja Thathachariar in his discourse said what an aspirant should essentially know is the difference between the Atma (soul) and the Sareera (body) and that the sufferings were at the physical plane only. 'If he refuses to get himself deeply involved in material affairs, the ties will get automatically loosened and he will experience Bliss'. The Bhagavatham describes the manner by which a devotee could get himself released from the worldly coils and the episodes of emperors Rishabavahana and Jadabharata prove this point.

(Sri Agnihotra Ramanuja Thathachariar)

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10. Worst sinner can also reach God: How?

A doubt that often arises in the mind of even a devout person is whether, in view of the enormity of misdeeds committed by him, he can approach the Almighty and whether he will be embraced by Him. Scriptures, however, assure the devotee that even the worst sinner can cross the ocean of grief with the help of the canoe- "Transcendental Knowledge (Jnana)". Even as a blazing fire burns a dries place of wood into ashes in a trice, the flame of Knowledge can wipe out all his sins. The steps to acquire this knowledge are: loving homage to God, service at His feet and philosophic inquiry about the Self and Supreme and their relationship. He who goes through the spiritual discipline carrying out his daily chores in a spirit of dedication, remaining in the world and yet out of its, is sure to experience the Divine Bliss.

While the devotee should certainly feel concerned about the void between him and God, as the latter possesses inimitable traits, he should not forget one of these most admirable qualities of the Supreme Being – His limitless compassion and His easy accessibility. The most abandoned sinner can seek His grace because of this mercy termed "Sowlabhyam". What God expects of him is that he should refrain from doing acts which He dislikes and perform only those which will gladden His heart. The two are broadly classified as "Sins" (Papam) and "Moral Good" (Punyam).

Sri T. Narasimharaghavachariar cited the Kathopanishad which dwells on the ways to abstain from indulging in deeds considered sinful. If the body can be likened to a chariot, the horses which draw it are the "Senses" (Indriyas). Using the intellect as the

reins, the mind (Charioteer) can control its gallop and steer the occupant through a safe journey, taking him to the destination. God has endowed every person with threee faculties – thinking, speaking and acting. He can put them to proper use and subdue the mind. He will come to realise the preasence of God within himself-seated in the heart in an atomic form.

(Sri T. Narasimharaghavachariar)

11. Spirituality is service of man

"It is good for us to see that the animal within us dies so that the man within us can live", is a profound statement by a modern scientist. Man becomes man only when he is able to rise beyond life in the five senses. Until this century, Science believed that through the senses alone, reality could be investigated and apprehended. The truth discovered through sense perception was considered unchallengeable. But the cocksureness is gone today. Biologists, especially, have started thinking at another level.

For long, evolution was organic. Progress was marked by species developing new, more complicated organs. But with the appearance of man, a revolution has taken place. The growth in man is marked not by new organs but by changes in his psyche. An animal is governed by instincts, but men, by values. Human evolution is the story of man's search for values. The world of the senses can give us the comforts and facilities that characterise consumerism, but not the eternal values that enrich the soul. This has been clearly stressed by the Upanishads, which speak of two types of knowledge, the "relative" and the "absolute". When sage Narada approached Sanatkumara for instruction, the latter asked him what he knew already. Narada reeled off an impressive

list of 18 sciences he had mastered. Sanatkumara pointed out that these constitute only the relative. The "absolute" is that by which the Imperishable is attained.

Swami Ranganadananda in a lecture said, our misery results because of identifying ourselves with the body. The first step in spiritual discipline is transcending the body consciousness. Our instinct is to be selfish In social and political life we see how selfishness rules the roost. Sri Ramakrishna, whose life was a veritable spiritual laboratory wherein he personally tested and revalidated the Upanishadic dicta, speaks of the 'unripe ego' and the 'ripe ego'. The former is the 'selfish gene' which has consideration only for itself – and Devil taking. The ripe ego, on the contrary, is a refined one, which has expanded in unselfishness and cares for the others. Real spirituality consists not in conventional piety but in the readiness to be of service to fellowmen, not minding personal inconvenience and sacrifice.

(Swami Ranganadananda)

12. The teachings of the Ramayana

The greatness of Ramayana is clearly described in a verse which says that when the Paramapurusha, proclaimed by the Vedas, was born as the son of Dasaratha, Vedas also made their appearance in the form of the Ramayana, composed by Valmiki. This gives rise to the questions, what are the contents of the Vedas and what are their purposes? The Vedas contain mantras or hymns for the performance of a variety of karmas, from birth to death, including several yagas, Ishtis and homas and also for conducting ceremonies for regaining lost health, getting over troubles caused by enemies, and the like. Though the Vedas contain a variety of such topics, being encyclopaedic in their range, they reveal to us,

according to the Upanishads, the existence of one and only Supreme God, the Paramatma.

Through a process of intense discipline, we must train our mind to develop equipoise, so that it will remain unaffected by pain or pleasure. Like water-drops on a lotus leaf, sorrows will not affect such persons. This state of perfection of mind achieved by a person is known as Yoga. Though a common meaning of Yoga is the bringing together of a number of materials or influences, the philosophic meaning is Viyogam, or cutting away from attachment.

Having realised true form of the Atma, a person does not think of anything else more profitable to achieve. A person in that state of realisation is least bothered by greatest of what appear as calamities. That state of perfection is Yoga, which has to be practised with determination of purpose and a steady mind. It is only through a process of discipline that the mind can be cleansed of all impurities and trained to be steady and to develop the capacity of single pointed concentration. That every person should, through proper education and discipline, attain the state of Yoga described above, before the soul departs from the body, is indicated by Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsa. We must be able to die with a smile on our lips. For, if we die without weeping, we will not have to weep after we die, that is, we will have no rebirth thereafter.

The Vedas are the source of Dharma. Sri Rama was the upholder and embodiment of Dharma. He protected it by his mental courage and disciplined life. Therefore, when he left for the forest for fourteen years to honour the pledge given by his father to Kaikeyi, his mother Kausalya offered ha talisman the very Dharma which he protected, so that Dharma may in turn protect him from all harms.

That is how the Tamil saying “Dharmam talai kaakum”, came in vogue. If a dog should protect us from thieves, we must take good care of it. Similarly, Dharma will protect us only when we take care of it. Sri Rama has become, therefore, a model for us all. He was endowed with patience and a calm mind. When a strong and powerful person sticks to the right path, he becomes model for others. Shivaji, through the influence of his guru, Ramadas, used his strength and power only in the right manner. For instance, when women belonging to his enemies fell into his hands as prisoners, during his battle, he took great care of them and restored them to their relations unharmed.

The Ramayana teaches us the essential principles of the Vedas. Any superior scripture is generally called “Veda” and no wonder the Ramayana has come to be revered as Vedas. The Parama-purusha spoken of in the Vedas is perfect and full embodiment of Dharma, and is Sri Rama of the Ramayana. The epic instructs us in karma, bhakti, and jnana, and in the Dharmic way of life. If we keep before ourselves the ideal of Sri Rama, we will be able to tide over every difficulty and danger and will be saved from straying into evil path. Sri Rama Naama smarana is the sure succour in life’s tribulations. Anjaneya who practised the japa of this Taaraka Mantra to perfection, is the embodiment of brahmacharya and valour, which are the most needed to endow us with strength to successfully go through the voyage of life. If we are anchored in Sri Rama and His supreme devotee, Sri Anjaneya, our mind will not be sullied by kaama or other passions, but will be disciplined to attain the reality pointed out by the Vedas.

(Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi)

13. God's compassion illustrated from Ramayana

When a tank is full and there is incessant downpour, the sluice gate should be lifted to ensure safety of the embankment. A repository of innumerable and inimitable traits, there is no opportunity for God to reveal them in His own celestial abode. This purpose is achieved through incarnations when He demonstrates to the world their application to enable people to follow these noble characteristics. Sri Rama's exemplary qualities are projected at every turn in the Ramayanam, such as forgiveness, magnanimity, goodwill, compassion, suavity, gentleness, easy accessibility and patience.

In his discourse Sri. P.B. Annangaracharya cited two examples of God's generosity and nobility which outshone others. When Sugriva wept over Vali's death, the Lord too sat dazed for quite some time. When Ravana was beaten on the battle-field and when he stood totally disarmed, Sri Rama could have killed him but He permitted him to go back to his palace and return the next day refreshed and well-equipped.

Though Sri Rama tried to hide His identity, yet, at the very commencement of the epic, Sage Viswamitra declared that God's incarnation was patently visible. His very action reflected that He was the Supreme Being and the Almighty. With His extraordinary powers He could have wiped out the Rakshasa tribe in a trice but He staged a Divine drama, undergoing sufferings even as a human being would experience. His gesture towards a true devotee is brought out in His not only welcoming Vibhishana to His fold but even complying with his suggestions to seek the help of the King of the Ocean to reach Lanka.

Sri Rama also indirectly spells out the essential requisites of "Saranagathi" that one should declare himself utterly helpless and dedicate every act to God. **(Sri. P.B. Annangaracharya)**

14. The Ramayana has lessons for all times

The Ramayana pervades our cultural life; every character has been presented to the reader in such a way that he or she can mould his or her future in a proper manner. The lessons learnt from them are applicable to all times and to all conditions of life. The hero is the embodiment of virtue, knows His obligations, is firm in executing the vows of protection and combines in Him very many rare qualities. Likewise, the Divine Mother who had manifested as His partner, enabled Him to establish Moral Law.

In portraying Ravana and Soorpanaka, the author of the epic has conveyed the disastrous consequences of falling victims to infatuation. Sister of the former, she was stuck by Sri Rama's dazzle and wanted to marry Him. Sri Rama felt that a time had come to cry a halt to her overtures. She did not mind even the presence of Sri Sita by His side. She was duly punished. Likewise, Ravana commited the sin of separating the Divine couple. Tradition holds that the two should never be worshipped separately. Bharata stands as a symbol of supreme sacrifice and of extreme dispassion. He discarded the kingdom that belonged to Sri Rama but was forced on him and decided to bring HiM back. Later, when he ruled it as Sri Rama's representative, he led an austere life, never enjoying power. Anjaneya tested his sincerity and was bewildered by his deep devotion.

In his discourse, Sri Sathyapramoda Thirtha of Uttaradi Math dwelt on the invocatory verse and raised the question how the pronouncement of a curse on the hunter who brought down the male bird when it was sporting with its mate, could be held as a "celebrated" one. But he said, its apparent meaning as embodying a curse was not satisfactory. The Swami split the words in such a manner as to convey the entire narrative in all the chapters.

On the Sundara Kanda, he said, the poet has termed it as "beautiful". The details relating to the sad days spent by the Divine Mother in captivity and the manner in which Anjaneya, as the messenger of the Lord, infused hopes in Her, are marvelously depicted in this chapter.

Being a summary of the Vedas, the reading of the Ramayana will fetch secular benefactions and will destroy the evil forces lurking within us. It is a book of perennial philosophy and if a listener has the ability to discern the inner meanings properly, he will be compelled to observe the code of pious conduct and prosper in life.

(Sri Sathyapramoda Thirtha of Uttaradi Math)

15. Truth alone can help one reach the Divine

A person whose heart is filled with peace, whose speech is suffered with truth and whose body is dedicated to service will be unaffected by the torments of the present age. Human life is noble, sacred and precious. Only they are endowed with the faculty to experience that they are part of the Divine. The human body is constituted by five elements of Nature and five sheaths. Man is encompassed by attachment to worldly desires, which produce delusions of various kinds. To secure liberation, he has to rid himself of various desires.

Everyone feels proud of his body, mind and intellect forgetting the soul, which has no birth or death. It is like the root of the tree which sustains the branches, the leaves, the flowers and fruits. It is the basis on which the super structure of life rests. The Vedas declare that man can attain immortality by renunciation. This means that a person has to renounce bad qualities. Men today are human only in form but have beastly traits. They should cultivate love of God, fear of sins and should adhere to social morality. When they cultivate both, they will not indulge in immoral deeds. It is hence meaningless to born as a human being if he leads an animal existence.

God can be known only by experience and not by experiments. For this, constant practice of spiritual exercises is needed. Of what use are experiments aimed at exploring space, if there is no genuine cultivation of human qualities and adherence to basic virtues like showing reverence to the parents and preceptors, said, Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a lecture, urging everyone to live up to the motto 'Help ever, hurt never.

Lord Rama had established an ideal for the society to follow. Urged by all to return to the city from His forest stay one of the sages even advocated certain arguments which smacked of atheism. Rama said : "I have given my word to carry out My father's command. How can I go back on it. It is better to give up the body than to do so. One should be grateful to one's parents, whether they are alive or dead. "The sun renders blind those who are ungrateful. I shall be the worst sinner and all people will follow Me and will also therby become sinners. Do you want Me to set such a bad example." Parents who train their children and provide comfort to them, the preceptors who guide them in exercising their discrimination and the "conscience" which enables them to decide judiciously are the guides for everyone. **(Sri Sathya Sai Baba)**

16. Quest for peace : Sri Krishna's mission

God acts according to the wishes of His sincere devotees. Sri Krishna agrees to go as an emissary and bring about a rapproachment between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, avoiding the path of war in settling their dispute. Fully aware that His errand will not be a success, He complies with the request of His devotees (the Pandavas). Only Sahadeva declares that a battle is inevitable.

Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar in his discourse referred to the several occasions when Krishna showed His real form as Sri Vishnu to many of His devotees, irrespective of their status. Vedanta Deasika has mentioned about Sri Krishna's darshan to a fruit vendor, who, struck by His beauty (as a child) presents Him with cherries. When her basket gets emptied, she looks up, only to witness His magnificent stature. At the same time, he basket is filled with priceless diamonds.

When preparations for the Kurukshetra battle are ready, Yudhishtirar gets depressed at the possible aftermath and urges Sri Krishna to prevail upon Duryodhana to come to terms thereby averting bloodshed. Arjuna and surprisingly even Bhima and Nakula share this view, although Sri Krishna makes it plain that one cannot expect fair play from Duryodhana. As He sets out on His task Draupadi reminds Him of the humiliation she had suffered at the hands of the Kauravas and Sri Krishna assures her, whether there be a war or a treaty, those who had insulted her will be duly punished.

Duryodhana refuses to part with even a square inch of territory and Gandhari's advice too proves a waste. When Duryodhana thinks of binding Sri

Krishna with ropes, the latter takes His Viswarupa, in which the entire universe is visible. The elders, including Dhritarashtra, whose eyesight is restored for the nonce, worshipped the Lord. Ultimately, the Pandavas win the war, proving that Dharmam and Satyam will always triumph. Throughout this mighty epic, the Mahabharatam, the value of these two qualities and the Pandavas' adherence to them in spite of the worst trials, are underlined.

(Sri Sengalipuram Anantarama Dikshitar)

17. Pious people are always patient and restrained

The trem "Itihas" (Epics) indicates that episodes in them are real and true and that the characters therein had actually gone through several vicissitudes. Their personal experiences had been brilliantly embroidered in the main theme, each one throwing valuable lessons to help posterity to set its own house in order. The tribulations of Draupadi, who was about to be publicly defamed, reveal three vital aspects closely associated with every individual's life stream. Unscrupulous element will have the least compunction in indulging in any ignoble deed, taking an inexplicable pleasure in tormenting others. There is no rationale behind their detestable behaviour. Otherwise, Duryodhana's brother would not have dared to attempt to disrobe her. Even under such worst provocations and although they have the inherent capacity to punish the culprits, men wedded to virtue will not take Law unto themselves but will strictly adhere to the rules of Righteousness, leaving the entire matter to the Diveine force to decide. Patience and restraint are the distinctive hallmarks of the pious like Yudhishtirar.

Sri R. Muthukrishna Sastrigal in his discourse said the third message projected by this episode is about God's unfailing mercy for those who seek His

protection without any reservation and realising that He alone is the ultimate refuge. God's response will be instantaneous to those who sincerely express their inability. In her perilous situation when the Pandavas stood utterly helpless at the atrocious acts of the Kauravas, Lord Krishna to whom Draupadi made a stirring appeal, came to her rescue. When one entrusts himself to the Almighty, He takes the responsibility to save him and He knows in what form and at what time should the help be extended. Draupadi's verse invoking His response has been suitably incorporated in our daily prayers. **(Sri R. Muthukrishna Sastrigal)**

18. Wealth and power must be used for public good

May be, one is endowed with enormous wealth, great prowess or extraordinary intellect. But that does not confer on him any right to intimidate harass or treat with contempt his less-fortunate brethren. He must guard himself against self-conceit and arrogance, the twin evils that are likely to stem from a feeling of superiority. It would be ideal if he uses the God-given gifts for the benefit of mankind. It is certainly objectionable if he resorts to oppression of the weak.

In the same way, the powers vested in the ruler of a country are intended to be used for public good, not to victimize anyone. Just because there is no one to challenge his authority, he cannot turn tyrannical, throwing to the winds all norms of justice and righteousness. Before long, he would be made answerable for all his misdeeds. Unlike the law of the land, which is made use of immediately to punish the criminals, the Almighty acts slowly but unerringly. The wrong-doers are often given a long rope. The idea is to give them a chance to mend their ways. In this interregnum, they seem to prosper and go stronger, making the righteous-minded sometimes wonder the wisdom of upholding Dharma itself.

Jarasandha, a mighty king, had many good traits, but he teased and humiliated other rulers. He had taken 86 kings captive, in pursuance of his decision to capture and decapitate one hundred rulers. Killing them in battle would not be improper because fighting was Kshatriya's duty and the one who died in action would reach the heaven. What Jarasandha had planned to do was just slaughter.

Sri T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal, in a discourse said that, though Sri Krishna had several encounters with Jarasandha, the Lord chose not to kill him Himself but had him slain through Bhima, thus paving the way for Yudhishtira to qualify for the performance of Rajasuya Yaga. **(Sri T.S. Balakrishna Sastrigal)**

19. Vidhra Needhi, code o conduct for all

The victim of adverse fate will first become perverted utterly losing his sense of right and wrong. His power of judgement destroyed by Time, the all powerful, he will act in a way which will lead him to ruin.

The above mentioned warning was tendered by an elder statesman to an emperor who had allowed his wicked sons to misbehave with a woman and adopt deceitful means to win the men whom they hated. The Mahabharata, in which this sense is enacted, reveals that distrust and anger breed contempt for those who are powerful and who have valour and wisdom. The result was the attempt to do away with such men.

When those wedded to virtue are driven to the edge, they will be inclined to feel that they have been singled out by God for such treatment. The Pandavas, who were forced to lead lives of ordinary citizens, were demoralised and so sought the advice of sages, who narrated to them episodes in which men of equal

eminence, if not more sagacious, had to go through indescribable privations but still did not lose their courage. That even men full of vicious thoughts will not hesitate to seek solace when they face problems, from wise men, is shown in the Epic by the manner in which the blind king approached his close friend and adviser Vidhura. The king feared the day when the Pandavas would return from exile. He spent a whole night listening to Vidhura's exposition on morals and code of conduct, Pandit V. Natesanar said in a lecture.

According to Vidhura, administration should be entrusted to competent and knowledgeable persons. The assets of a wise one who aspires for higher ideals are forbearance, exertion and steadiness in virtue. He will carry out duties which he knows will be within his capacity. His actions and plans will not be disclosed to others until they are accomplished. He will not be affected by honours or by slights. For a foolish man, scripture is a closed book.

Poison kills only one man who consumes it and so does a weapon but wicked counsel destroys an entire kingdom. Supreme peace is forgiveness and supreme happiness is benevolence. A ruler should never confer with men of small sense, those who procrastinate, the indolent and the sycophants, should avoid drowsiness, fear, anger and arrogance and never forsake truth, charity, diligence and patience. When a person dies, only his merits and sins will accompany him. Asceticism, self-restraint, knowledge, sacrifice, pure marriages and gifts of food are the hallmarks of a noble family. The advice of Vidhura, is a treatise on Virtue embedded in the Epic. Still the blind king's mind remain clouded. **(Pandit V. Natesanar)**

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20. Discharge duties with equanimity of mind

Devotion to God is neither mere emotional rapture nor does it imply an extravagant o show during worship. It cannot be assed by mere external of a man like his donning an ochre robe or wearing of caste marks. These alone cannot certify a person as highly religious. They are no doubt necessary but what distinguishes saintly men from others is their contentment and ever remaining free from depression or elation. Their joy arises in discharging their spiritual obligations with genuine interest and with the feeling that they merely carry out God's orders. They will thus be clearly identified by their detached attitude.

Some devotees who may be enjoying prosperity blame God when they pass through difficulties in life. Such men do not for a moment think about the cause for their grief. If they do so, they will realize that they have come to suffer by virtue of their own misdeeds. But, why should even saintly men and those who sincerely uphold the Divine commandments be made to face problems? In the case of such highly evolved souls, sciptures say that their grief is the result of their past acts. Saintly men will realise that the tests given to them are intended to wipe out the consequences of past sins. The good that they have done will fetch them rich dividends.

Hence God should never be blamed. He is impartial and acts like a teacher who shows no favouritism though one among his pupils comes out with flying colours while another obtains only average marks. Scriptures say that trials devotees undergo gradually diminish the impact of sins. The good they

do will accumulate and they are bound to emerge successful in the end.

The Mahabharata relates how the Pandavas were virtuous had to undergo grief almost continuously to the extent of demoralising them at one stage. But the symbol of patience, Yudhishtira advised the others to bear the trials w fortitude. In his discourse, Sri N. Babu Dikshitar explained how another severe challenge was thrown before them when Sage Durvasa, known for his short temper egged on by their foes, demanded lunch for himself and his huge retinue at an odd hour. Even then, Yudhtira maintained his calm and Draupadti prayed to God to save them from this grim situation. When Lord Krishna appeared and partook the tiny bit of curry leaf sticking to the vessel that was given to her by the Sun God, the sage and his men felt that they had been fed and apologised for having caused inconvenience to them.

One more test was in the form of a Yaksha (a celestial who remined unseen) to whom belonged a pool from which four of the brothers drank water not heeding a warning and collapsed, Yudhishtira cleared all the doubts of the Yaksha and brought back his brothers to life. **(Sri N. Babu Dikshitar)**

21. Pathway to everlasting bliss

Desire is the prime motive force for human actions. Any appeal to an ordinary man to give up desire, do the karmas without longing for the fruits and surrender himself to God will not carry conviction easily. The kamya karmas (desire impelled acts) are intended to create faith in God and initiate a person into the path of devotion. Gradually, he would himself realise the fleeting nature of worldly pleasure and be inducted to cling to the Lord's feet and aspire for everlasting bliss by doing nishkamya karmas.

Sri Umayalpuram R. Sivarama Sastrigal said that the provacation for Dhruva resorting to penance with a remarkable tenacity was the denial by his stepmother (Suruchi) of his right to sit on the lap of his father (King Uthanapada). The self-conceited Suruchi told him that, to become eligible for it, he should perform tapas, obtain God's grace, and be born to her. Urged by the desire to win his rightful status, Dhruva was determined to seek His benignancy. His mother (Suneeti) also blessed him for Dwadasakshara Mantra and the method of doing tapas. At the end of five months of rigorous penance Sri Narayana granted darshan to him.

22. Need to discard arrogance and pride

Lust and greed are the deadly evils which cloud our minds. When one cultivates an absolutely detached attitude towards worldly gains, develops the will-power to curb carnal pleasures, get rid of the desire to accumulate unbounded wealth and discard the habit of acquiring limitless movable and immovable property, his heart becomes thoroughly cleansed, making it fit for God to dwell for ever. God identifies Himself with such an ardent devotee, showering all His affection and protecting him for ever.

Sri Karopangadu Venkatachariar in his discourse referred to Narada's advice to Prachetasas which bore the stamp of pure Visishtadwaita philosophy. Acquisition of knowledge performance of rites, strict practice of codes, vibrant talk and other such traits were of no avail if a person did not dedicate them all to Sri Vishnu the Supreme, the Immanent and the Infinite. Caught in the turmoil of life, man vanish once he was able to differentiate between the body to which he clung with undue attachment, and the immaculate soul. Worship of Sri Vishnu would please all Gods as water poured at the root reached all parts of the tree.

None in this world was free from some kind of worry, but it should not prevent him from exceeding mercy to his fellow-beings. He should remain content with what God had provided him, and control his unbridled sensory organs particularly the tongue, which was most difficult to keep in check. Sometimes, those well-placed and occupying exalted positions, by virtue of their birth, or because of their wealth, or on account of their higher education or by their mastery over the scriptures, tended to become haughty, to the extent of even showing disregard to others equally well-versed and accomplished. Worship by them, marked by usual fanfare and pomp would not evoke any response from God, who would never grace persons who showed intellectual arrogance or exhibited pride.

(Sri Karopangadu Venkatachariar)

23. Character alone distinguishes a person

The acts of a human being are subject to severe limitations. He may plan a scheme with diligence and care but while on stream, it may unexpectedly collapses. When it turns out to be a success, he will take the entire credit upon himself and boast of his skill and technical perfection without caring to acknowledge the grace of God. If by chance the scheme fails, he will attribute it to the lack of Divine sanction. A devotee should never rely on his personal endeavour but submit himself to the dictates of the Almighty and seek His blessings for any venture, as the decision of the unseen mysterious Power is final, unquestionable and unalterable. Episodes in scriptures din this theme into us and highlight the fact that man's ability is puerile and ineffective before the strength of the Supreme Being. Sri Rama's exile proves this by His coronation being called off at the last moment. Likewise, events went contrary to all expectations for the unscrupulous elements in God's incarnation as Sri Krishna. Kamsa who was deeply attached to his

cousin Devaki, was even reluctant to part with her company after marriage but he wanted to kill her on the spot when informed that her son-to-be-born would cause his death.

Sri Embar Vijayaraghavachariar in his discourse in said through the characters of Kamsa, Sisupala and Jarasanda on the one hand and Vasudeva etc., on the other, God compares the conduct of the wicked and the virtuous and Dharma and Adharma. As Sri Krishna, God not only demonstrated His Supremacy (Paratwa) but also shown that character alone distinguished a person and other considerations like his birth in a higher caste were irrelevant. Sages who wanted to realise God were struck by the manner in which Yasoda, unable to bear the mischievous pranks of the Divine child, attempted to tie Him to a stone mortar but miserably failed till He himself volunteered to be bound. God is ready to reveal to devotees who plead their helplessness and seek His guidance. **(Sri Embar Vijayaraghavachariar)**

24. Nature has many lessons for man

While all lower creatures are to some extent capable of looking after their own welfare, man, who is endowed with intelligence and the discriminative power, can surely be his own teacher. By observation and inference, he can understand what will contribute to his ultimate good. He can gain superior knowledge from every creation of God's. The spiritual master will teach him that God alone is the cause of all causes, but he can learn from other teachers various aspects of spiritual doctrines and practices. 'Nature' provides him lessons on various aspects governing his conduct. A wise man can visualise the presence of God in every creation.

The Bhagavatham has a chapter on the discussion between a king and a young spiritual personality, wandering monk. The king asked him how he remained always happy, unaffected by worldly cravings. To this, the holyman gave an exposition on the behaviour of birds, beasts and insects which, if adopted by a man, will bring him peace and help him to get over the worldly travails. He listed out 24 such "teachers" and their ways and characteristics, a gist of which was given by Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar in a discourse. The human body, which is obtained after countless births as animals and birds, is a rare blessing. A wise man should hence strive, as long as the body lasts, for liberation from the transmigratory cycle.

Some people arrived at a house with marriage proposals for a girl living there. As no elder was present, the girl herself received them. To preapare them food, she went inside to husk paddy but the two pairs of bangles on her arms made sound and she felt that this would betray their poverty. One by one she removed them, ultimately retaining only one on each arm. There was then no sound.

The moral was, the young saint said, that there would be quarrel if too many persons stayed together and no one would think of God. Living alone and aloof was ideal for meditation. Another sermon learnt was from a courtesan who, having waited for clients, was disappointed that none came. She then developed revulsion at her way of life and recited a song on renunciation thanking God for having removed her ignorance. The essence of her poignant song was that desire was the source of sorrows. From even mountains and trees, as aspirant should learn to strive unselfishly for the good of others, the saint explained.

(Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar)

25. The Almighty is impartial

The direct utterance or revelations of God (the Vedas) at times give rise to doubts and different interpretations. This naturally evokes derision among non-believers about God's supremacy, as how the "deeply venerated" Almighty Himself can err. What is the purpose then in relying on these statements? There are more than 3000 references in the Vedas favouring the arguments of those inclined to denigrate God. In other fields also the Vedas appear to present contradictory views. But it must be understood clearly that wherever such ambiguous aphorisms are seen, sages and saints who had mastery over the Vedic revelations had given appropriate clarifications, leaving no scope for confusion. Scriptures categorically say that God is impartial and favours none. He is compassionate and merciful. How then can one account for the very same scriptural authority giving instances of God going to rescue of the celestials and punishing the demoniac forces. Even today, some refer to these episodes and brand God as having shown His preference for some.

The Bhagavatam was recited to enable an emperor secure peace within a brief time as he was cursed to die because of an act of indiscretion. Listening to God's glory mentioned in the various incarnations, the emperor desired to know why God has displayed antagonism towards a demon king and had taken a special incarnation as 'Narasimha' (man-lion form).

In his discourse, Sri Mukkur Lakshiminarasimhachariar referred to the emperor's question, "Was God actuated by partiality? He had nothing to gain from the celestials nor entertain enmity against the demon race". In reply, Sage Suka said an identical question was put even earlier, during the days of the Mahabharata when Yudhishtira sought to get elucidation from Narada about certain strange incidents like the 'absorption' into Lord Krishna of His sworn enemy Sisupala and again those who had reviled against Him, merging into Him. Narada explained how one should concentrate one's mind on the Lord completely

either through enmity or through total freedom from it (by continuous and steady devotion).and gave practical illustrations.

Lord Shiva had praised the Divine form of Narasimha in His "Mantra Raja Pada Stotram", a hymn that had been accepted as unique and efficacious by the Acharya of all schools. Its recitation by devotees daily will provide wealth (here and hereafter in God's kingdom in the form of eternal service), spiritual knowledge and physical power, and will remove fear, tension, hallucination and sins. The estoric significance of the mantras studded in this simple but effective hymn of 12 verses was presented by Siva to Parvati and has been widely commented upon.

(Sri Mukkur Lakshiminarasimhachariar)

26. Universality of Gita

The teachings embodied in the Bhagavad Gita possess eternal value and are universal in their applicability. This is the only philosophical work that enjoys the widest currency. It has been translated and annotated into several Indian and Western languages. Its message continues to be as fresh and inspiring today, as it was when the Lord delivered it to Arjuna. Though there are other equally elevating teachings, some of which have also the suffix Gita, why is that the Celestial Song, the message of true knowledge delivered to Arjuna by Sri Krishna, has come to occupy a supreme place? The answer is to be found in the setting in which this Divine message was given to the world.

The setting of Gitopadesa is the battlefield of Kurukshetra, where the two contending armies, the armies of the Pandavas and of the Kauravas, are arrayed in battle formation and poised to go into action at the given signal. Arjuna is the central figure in this interesting drama. He is seated in his chariot and Lord Krishna Himself is the charioteer. Arjuna, who, a liitle while ago, more or less directed Sri Krishna to spur the horses forward and station his chariot in between the opposing armies, has humbled himself into the position of a pupil at the feet of the Divine Charioteer, whom he has raised to the pedestral of a Teacher. Arjuna surrenderes himself unreservedly to the mercy of Krishna and implores him to guide him. The situation is so tense that Arjuna is not sure whether the next moment his head will be standing intact on his shoulders, or will be rolling in the dust soaked with the blood of the fighting men. In actual life, we see that a passing shower is enough to melt an audience listening to a discourse on Truth. People are more concerned with saving their clothes than hearing advice, however ennobling it may be. But here is a case where a man in the jaws of death is waiting to learn and the Lord is willing to teach. It is this setting that has endowed the Bhagavad Gita with eternal value and supremacy over all other teachings.

There is also aspect to the situation. Arjuna has proved himself fit to receive any advice or direction the Lord may choose to give. Hostilities are about to commence and there is no knowing how many and who all will lose their lives. Arjuna is no coward and does not want to run away from the battlefield, though he has expressed his unwillingness to fight. His only objection to fight is that the war entail his killing those whom he regards as his elders and relations. He does not mind being killed by the opponents, without himself raising even his little finger to harm those arrayed in the slaughter inherent in a war may be avoided. That means, Arjuna has overcome all desires and attachment to life. He has attained the state of mind which is fit to receive true knowledge. There can be no better touchstone to test the complete detachment of a person than the battlefield. Arjuna is desirous to

learn the only thing that matters –Jnana or Truth. Seeing that Arjuna has come out successful in the qualifying test and made himself fit to receive knowledge, the Lord teaches him. That is also how the message of the Gita has come to possess eternal and lasting value.

Incidentally, Arjuna has made out a good case for banning all wars. He says that any war is wrong and if one side is foolish enough to resort to arms, it is better to ward off aggression by refusing to retaliate, and thereby bringing about unilateral disarmament. In that case, the casualty will be low. The violence of war is different from the violence of punishment imposed by a Judge for a crime. A Judge is a disinterested person and punishment is intended to act as a deterrent, to check the tendency to commit crimes or evil deeds. The disgrace attached to imprisonment and the hardship inside jails make people afraid to commit crimes.

But war stands on a different footing. It wipes out elders from society, leaving children and women without any guidance. Consequently there is disruption of family life, leading to deterioration of Dharma and the loss of chastity. When women lose their chastity, Varna Sankara is the consequences. Varna Sankara resulys in suffering Naraka, eternal misery. In the general interest of Dharma, it is far better to submit bravely and without retaliating to extermination than to retaliate and suffer greater human loss. After expressing this view, Arjuna remains heart-broken.

But how does Krishna meet the argument? His reply contain a touch of admonition. “Cast off your mental weakness and arise,” says Krishna. “If you decide to refrain from fighting, it must not be from a sense of grief over the deaths that will result from it.

Your weeping implies that you are affected by egoism and attachment, the sense of the “I” and the “mine”. Fighting is the action that you should do as a Kshatriya. In your present state of mind, you have not attained the qualification to abjure all actions. Activity ceases only in the case of an unattached person. You are attached to your relatives, elders and teachers and bemoan their sure death in the battle. And so, inactivity is not yours now. You have not yet required the Siddhi, you should do the karma ordained by your Svadharma,” says the Lord. Therefore, Krishna wants Arjuna to achieve personal perfection before he can qualify for this humanitarian attitude of absence from fighting.

The Lord’s teachings embodied in the Gita contain the answer to the question often posed, namely, which should have preference, individual salvation or Lokakshema. The Gita makes it plain that unless one is perfect oneself, one is not qualified to engage oneself in acts of public good, Lokakshema. A person who weeps or is angry, that is, a person who is himself subject to grief or anger cannot succeed in removing the like ills of others. The man who is subject to delusion is not qualified to rid the world of its delusions.

And if there is a person who has overcome grief and other infirmities that subvert the soul, then his very existence in this world will contribute to public weal. He need not go out to reform the world, he need not strive for Lokakshema, the world will learn to reform itself by his example and its consequent conduct will, of its own accord, lead to Lokakshema.

The only way to overcome grief and other infirmities is through Jnana. That is why the Lord

proceeds to gradually instruct Arjuna in the truths of Atma Jnana, which ultimately dispels his delusions. The Gita begins with the grief of Arjuna. The Lord chided him for it at the commencement of His Gitopadesa, but towards the close tells him, "Do not grieve". The command to fight, shows that even at the cost of the death of many warriors on both sides, one should perform one's Svadharma as a Kshatriya. For, the practice of Svadharma without attachment and with resignation, will alone make for Chittasuddhi so necessary for Jnana Praapti. Such a Jnani becomes perfect soul, who, by his very presence, brings about Lokasangraha in the truest sense of the term, and in the most effective manner. Individual elevation will enable one to lift others.

(Sri. Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi)

27. Man should work like a refinery

Lord Krishna's message in the Song Celestial is that even in the midst of work, a man can see the divine. The teaching is based on the "Philosophy of action" and is concerned about the "man at work". Humanism has been there for a long time, but the real test is to see whether we behave in a human way. Humanism seems to have been forgotten over the years. The Bhagavad Gita inspires us to tap the humanistic impulses. The "infinite" manifests itself in all human beings like the Sun whose reflection can be seen in ponds, lakes and pools. Man is the centre of infinite possibilities because his soul is pure, has no hatred and does not give room for violence. Religion is the manifestation of Divinity in man and there is spiritual background because it is in his very nature. What is needed is that he should learn the science of unfolding the tremendous at any times. As the Upanishad says, we should "march on".

In a lecture, Swami Ranganadananda referred to the process of crude oil being tapped, refined and then made the end product. Likewise, the human body should be converted into a refinery of experience. By removing the dirt, we should be refined, converting hatred into love. "We have to create a humanistic social order. "There should be concern for others and we must ponder whether we have prayed at least once for others.

The Gita says that "work and worship" are the same. If someone is offensive in speech, we should not retaliate. Forget it for a day or two, your mind will become calm and you will never retaliate. We should enrich society by good work. The study of Gita develop character. We should think that everyone is our neighbour and do everything to help remove the sufferings of others. The greatest task is to destroy all anti-human feelings.

28. The Gita is Vedas in essence

The statements made in the extensive Divine, self-revealed, Vedas are categorical, eternal, irrefutable and have permanent validity. These utterances clearly indicate who the Supreme controller of the world and humanity is and how He can be perceived and realised. To study the vast lore and to determine the gradual steps of duties in life are difficult for men. Hence, a succinct, simple, scientific and definite conclusion regarding Vedic principles was needed. The Epics, Puranas and other sacred works were contributed by sages and saints through narratives incorporating the directives given by God for men to avert rebirths. If one follows them, one will get the reward. Disobedience will naturally attract punishment.

The Mahabharatam contains all the revealations, explained directly. In this monumental

scriptural text, the Bhagavad Gita is enshrined, dispelling man's doubts and affirming the "Reality", paving the way for man to return to God. There are several commentaries on the Gita, one differing from another and sometimes one found even opposed to the other. But the gita was delivered by the Lord Himself and so is in strict conformity with Vedic teachings. Being infallible, its contents cannot be given "twists" to suit erroneous beliefs and views. Doubts in interpreting certain sayings may arises but the clarifications have to be only in consonance with basic source—the Vedas and Sastras.

Srimad Andavan Swami in a discourse on the Gita, said Ramanuja has written a brilliant commentary, drawing inspiration from Alavandar's crisp work. Ramanuja learnt the secrets embedded in the Lord's poem, 18 times which only shows how important it is and how God has enabled men to recover from drooping faith. If Alavandar (Yamuna) had laid a foot path to reach God's abode, Ramanuja had made it a royal road. Vedanta Desika has also rendered the Gita's message, explaining that Sri Krishna in this celestial song, has removed the confusion in Arjuna's mind. Scriptures point out that digesting the Gita, taking a dip in the holy Ganga, chanting the Gayatri mantra and reciting the name Govinda (the four-Gs) will prevent re-birth. **(Srimad Andavan Swami)**

29. Five qualities needed to reach God

Five "adjustments" are needed in our personality to reach God. They are in the nature of preparatory exercise which should be attempted by each one of us. These are: freedom from pride and infatuation, conquering the vice of attachment, dwelling constantly in God, complete disappearance of desires and remaining unaffected by pairs of opposites such as pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, love and hatred and name and fame. Those who possess these trails will attain the Supreme Being and the unchangeable state of Bliss. These requirements were enunciated by God Himself to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita.

Having described the real form of the world-tree, Lord Krishna in His message said that this deeprooted one should be felled by the sharp sword of non-attachment. This formidable weapon of detachment or dispassion should enable an aspirant to avoid developing attachment towards children, to wealth and to the world. Such a person should also be strengthened by a resolute bent of mind towards the Supreme Self and sharpened again and again on the whetstone of the practice of true discrimination. Then he should seek for and know the abode of God. The one who has reached this goal will never return to the world. He seeks refuge in the primeval person, from whom has emanated this beginningless flow of creation. The one who desires for the cessation of this worldly thirst for enjoyment should surrender himself to that Lord and worship Him with pure devotion.

Swami Chinmayananda said in his discourse that in his bound state, a man wrongly identifies himself with his perverted ego and tries to lord over the phenomenal world. The evil that makes men tethered to worldly activities is attachment. Such a person will lavish his affection, on his children but to a distant relative, he would not show the same warmth of love. Dwelling constantly in God can be experienced by reading scriptural lore, at least a few verses daily. Those who reach the goal should avoid desires because the same will raise one after another and hence endless. Joy or sorrow should not toss such a person up and down. Desires having fled from him without leaving any taint behind, the undeluded should reach the goal…the Lord's abode**(Swami Chinmayananda)**

30. Gita is God's recipe to remove grief

Life should have a purpose and meaning, God Himself has said. Man can live in peace and without problems if he keeps his mind pure. But invariably the mind has wicked propensities which do not allow him to experience happiness. The message for humanity to do its duty and remain free from grief has been given by Sri Krishna in His sermon to Arjuna. God's utterances in His dialogue with Arjuna, called the Bhagavad Gita, show the way to maintain the balance of mind. Arjuna was only a symbol and through him, the Lord provides us the answer to all our ills.

From time immemorial, Hinduism has been and will be guiding mankind. Its teachings have been interpreted by many. Likewise, the Divine declarations in the Bhagavad Gita have been analysed and commented upon by so many from different angles. There is still scope for new interpretations, revealing how this great Hymn is a source of inspiration for all.

Adi Sankara has referred to the essence of the 18 chapters in just one verse. "For those who deserve no grief, you have shown your poignant feelings. For the living and for the dead, the wise will not grieve." After explaining what Arjuna should do, the Lord concludes, "Abandoning all righteous deeds, seek me as your sole refuge. I will liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve. "Listening to God's exposition, Arjuna replied that his delusion had been destroyed. "I will do as you commend."

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, Kanchi Sankaracharya, in a lecture said that from the sentiments expressed in the Gita, it could be seen how destiny played its role in man's activities. Grief would certainly be experienced but man can remain unaffected by it. Gita is God's recipe to wipe out man's

tears. The Lord's dissertation outlines how one should conduct oneself. If the message is applied, there will be no scope for doubts in men.

God resides in our minds which should be kept pure. But bad thoughts are bound to creep in. They can be removed by upholding righteousness. This human document enables men in their journey through life by outlining his charter of duties.

(Sri Jayendra Saraswathi)

31. Gita asks people to keep the mind pure

The enormity of Hindu religious literature is such that it will be difficult for all men to study and digest them during their lifetime. The salient features of this great faith and the rights, duties and responsibilities of a person have been provided in the Bhagavad Gita in which the doctrines and the messages of the entire ancient wisdom have been packed. In short, this glorious hymn asks men to keep their mind pure and try to help others. If, however, it is not possible to do so, at least no harm or injury should be done to anyone.

India is gifter with several fine arts, spiritual guidelines and tradition. Their relevance to humanity is mentioned in innumerable sacred texts. Apart from the directives in the Vedas, various teachings and moral codes have been incorporated in the Epics and Puranas. Science like Astrology and Ayurveda have also been covered. The essence of God's declarations is that everyone should fill the hearts.

In the 18 chapters of His celestial song, Lord Krishna has advised men on how to develop an integrated personality, said Sri Vijayendra Sarawathi (Junior Swami of Kanchi Math). Briefly, the Lord's commands are: to do one's duties, to offer worship and to remain detached by renouncing desires. (Yaja, Bhaja and Thyaja). One should have faith in Divine dispensation. People should carry out religious duties as prescribed and discard worldly desires. Not that should they totally abjure them but they

should participate in activities which will gladden God's heart. Above all, there should be no room for hatred. Based on the Gita, wise men have advised people to develop knowledge about the Divinity and moral courage. **(Sri Vijayendra Sarawathi)**

32. Be not as ignorant as musk deer

In spite of remarkable achievements in various fields, man is unhappy. But everything will be fine for him, if only he learns to be humble and accept the fact that what he thinks he has gained, was made possible for him by God. He should acknowledge that God has helped him to register the progress he has made and His guidance is absolutely necessary in all his endeavours. Such a faith is necessary as the first step for his spiritual advancement even while he lives in this material world.

Saint Ramadas once visited an Anjaneya temple. The priest, who felt himself to be a very important person had went out to fetch water, ignoring the presence of Ramdas who prostrated behind his back. This was repeated even after the priest returned. The peculiar conduct of the visitor surprised the priest who asked him why he prostrated behind him. Ramdas replied that the salutations were not for him but to Anjaneya who had entered the temple when the priest left and made his exit when the priest came back. The latter realized his guilt of not displaying humility despite his learning.

Real happiness does not lie in satisfying one's desires. Love and attachment bind men, causing despair. Refusing to be lured by their glamour, man should direct his attention towards God. Happiness thus lies in transcending the worldly attraction. Like the deluded musk deer which does not know that the scent emanates from a gland in its body, a person fails to realise that the source of joy is within him, i.e., his own Self. Two verses in Bhagavad Gita present a fine structure of a man's gradual process of self-destruction. Attachment formed by musing on objects, generates desire, which when not

fulfilled, produces anger, as a result of which the capacity to discriminate fails and man feels unhappy. To illustrate how desires form a chain, Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami said a saint wanted to initiate a disciple who expressing his gratitude, first wanted to get married and lead a family life for a brief period. Later, he sought more time to see his child growth and then for him to study. Several years later, the miseries of life made him go to the master, who took him to the seashore. Gazing at the ocean, the saint stood for a long time when the disciple felt uneasy at the delay. "I am waiting for the waves to subside when alone the time will ripe for initiation" said the saint making him realise his folly in expecting all desires to subside. "Remember God when you are happy, forget yourself when you are in sorrow." **(Sri Ganapathi Satchidananda Swami)**

33. Man must not shirk his duties

The clarion call of the Lord to take refuge in Him, when a sincere devotee finds it difficult to adopt the charter of duties, leaving the responsibility of steering him through the worldly activities in His hands, has been misunderstood by some that God will provide them all their needs and that they need not do anything. God never asks anyone to sit idle hoping to be served all that they want, on a platter. Far from it, God wants everyone to do the enjoined duties without motivation, desire or anticipating rewards.

In his Bhagavad Gita, God lays great emphasis on human effort, along with devotion to Him, not swept off by unwholesome emotion, or obsessed by the anticipation of the benefits of one's acts. The Mahabharata provides solution for all the ills that man may experience and the Gita forming part of it, is a document that outlines not only his Godward journey, but a list of duties, the performance of which will secure him well being.

The special appeal of the Gita is to a person who stands bewildered at the crossroads wondering how to get rid of the various problems. God gives His confidential advice to him in

his hour of distress. The message in the poem will enable him to face and not avoid action. The Gita is not opposed to action. Its ethics is not anti-hedonistic. It urges the man in dilemma to shake off his faint-heartedness. Devotion and duty are the essential requirements for him to lead a life of poise. The duty should be dedicated to God giving up desire for the fruit.

The Lord in His directives given through this hymn refers to the three fundamental evils which man should abhor, viz, attachment, ego and desires. The Gita does not oppose human pleasure but wants men to enjoy life in such a way not opposed to the Law of Virtue. Its attitude is positive. His attachment should be diverted from material activities towards spiritual duties, placing total reliance on God. Man should not be gripped by delusion. He should not be completely immersed in sorrow when

34. Duties that please celestials

Nearly 2,000 years ago, one of the greatest Tamil poet-reformer Thiruvalluvar, had posed a question why some people alone were wise while a majority were not so intelligent, were not so rich or were not physically fit.

He had himself given the answer to this riddle by stating that the former, who were a few, had earned God's favour by having carried out the duties which pleased Him, whereas the latter had failed to discharge their pious obligations and had thus been Divine grace.

Among the many forms of spiritual duties is the ceremony to appease the chief of the celestials (Indra), to ensure that Nature lavishes her bounty on humanity. Service to God and other deities associated with Him, in any form, is deemed as service to society.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse referred to the story of a commoner who was made a scholar in a trice, as it were. The person was a servant in the kitchen where the offerings to God were being prepared. From Srirangam where he worked, he went one day to the neighbouring pilgrim center, Tiruvanaikkoil and

was, by force of circumstances, made to stay inside Divine Mother's shrine during the night when he was personally blessed by the latter and emerged as a distinguished post – by scribing a few words on his tongue. He turned out to be the illustrious Kalamegam.

Supernatural events are being witnessed even now when God chooses to prove His supreme powers. But prayers and observances of austerities like "Sankranti" festivals are needed. The Vedic mantras carry the appeals to various deities. They ask people to be faithful upholders of the rules God had laid, one of them being the need to seek the company of only the pious who will inculcate in us, a sense of humility. Rain makes no distinction when it pours but the quality of the water that we use changes according to the nature of the soils on which it lands, like murky, sweet and brackish. Worship of God and the company of the Godly persons will remove our defects and fetch us Divine grace.

(Sri Kripanandavariar)

35. How meat blunts finer feelings

The food that a person consumes has direct bearing on his behaviour and outlook. The articles which can be consumed and those which ought to be prohibited have been prescribed, centuries ago, by Saint Thiruvalluvar who had categorically laid down in his famed code Thirukkural that taking liquor and eating meat should be totally avoided.

To illustrate how eating of flesh of other animals to fatten oneself is sinful, he has devoted one full chapter. The meat-eater, he says in his opening couplet, cannot possess a melting heart in which compassion can dwell. Meat-eating is inconsistent with tenderness to life. These people may not know what mercy is. Meat consumption cannot be explained away on the grounds it cures certain diseases and should be taken in small quantities. Like the heart of a sword-wielder which will be made of steel, the heart of one who tastes the flesh of animals will be hard to goodness. By not eating meat, a life will be saved. The doors of

hell will be kept ajar to those who consume it, the Saint says. It is an act which is at once the cause and consequence of butchery of living beings and hence is not becoming of a man of compassion.

Sri. S.R. Themozhiar in a lecture said it is wrong to presume that eating the flesh of animals provides physical strength. Not only is it harmful as it will only result in corpulence but may kindle the baser instincts. Vegetarians are not weak and they can face any situation. A few may argue: "Some one butchers. I only purchase and what is wrong. If people decide not to eat meat, no one will make a trade or a profession of slaughtering living creatures. Even if it is bought form a shop and consumed at home, it is a sin. As one who abets a crime also gets punished, one who buys meat, making somebody else kill an animal, will be considered a greater sinner. What is meat but a cruel and ugly ulcer in the body of another creature? How can one, who realises this, can make it an article of food? Refrain from causing death to any form of life, even should it be to save your own life commands the Saint. Some refer to the animal sacrifice in Vedic rites. Only those who wrongly interpret the Divine utterances, will resort to this. Rice alone is to be offered in the flames and imperfections due to the bad influence of the senses are asked to be sacrificed. **(Sri. S.R. Themozhiar)**

36. The significance of Adi Sankara's works

The very complexion of certain glorious traditions, backed by religious sanctions, had undergone total transformation by efflux of time, resulting in their very purpose being defeated. One such is the custom of giving dowry. At present, parents of some bridegrooms extract money from the parents of the brides unmindful of the sacrifice the latter have to go through. The demand is often based on the qualification, status and personality of the groom. In olden days the system was the reverse, the emphasis being that the married couple should remain happy throughout. Apart form the girl's accomplishments, charm and family

background, what the elders were concerned about was her compatibility and her capacity to adapt herself to the new surroundings. It was the bridegroom's family which met the expenses for the marriage. This however, did not mean that the boy's parents were rich and that their offer was merely to display their prosperity.

The life history of Adi Sankara provides proof of the wisdom of our forbears. At the time of the marriage of his father Siva Guru with Aryamba, the former's parents insisted on bearing the expenditure on the bride, on the ceremony and on the jewels to adorn her. The Ramayana also illustrates this by the lavish sum spent by Dasaratha during Sri Rama's wedding celebrations. Sri Udayalur A. Rajagopala Sarma in his discourse referred to the outstanding hymn, Bhaja Govindam, composed by Adi Sankara. Pointing out the consequences flowing out of getting bogged in shortlived pleasures, he says a woman will hesitate even to touch the body of her husband, whom she loved most, when he dies.

The torchbearer of Vedic religion, a thinker, a reformer said missionary, Adi Sankara was also magnanimous as reflected in accepting a flaw, pointed out by a Harijan. Seeing him coming from the opposite direction, holding four dogs (he was Lord Viswanath, with the four Vedas), Sankara asked him to keep off, when the untouchable told him that his remark seemed to differ from his Advaita philosophy. Did his command refer to the body or the soul? If so, was the Sun's reflection in the river Ganges and in the gutter water different? Sankara realised that he was in front of God and offered obeisance.

(Sri Udayalur A. Rajagopala Sarma)

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37. God steps in when Dharma wanes

It is a Divine law that whenever there is utter social decadence and anarchy, God steps in to re-establish righteousness. About 13 centuries ago – it was an age of strife, it was a sorry state of affairs in all spheres when there was spiritual bankruptcy, when people began to forget Vedic teachings on account of the propaganda by inimical forces, when Hindu tenets were attacked and when as many as 72 sects raised their banners. It was then the Lord Siva incarnated as Adi Sankara, stemmed the crisis and restored Hinduism to its high position.

A philosopher who popularized Advaita, visionary, teacher and reformer. Adi Sankara was a precocious child, even conducting Pooja for the family deity substituting his father when the latter was taken ill. By his devotional appeal, he made God and the Divine Mother reveal their presence and partake the milk he offered. While on his daily rounds for "Biksha", he noticed the sincerity of a woman who, unable to provide him food, offered the only berry she had, that too dried. In turn, Sankara recited 21 verses invoking the mercy of the Divine Mother (called Kanakadara Stotram) and caused a shower of golden coins to help the humble benefactor.

In a discourse Sri. S. Venkatesa Sastrigal said while Lord Siva took the role of Sankara at the request of celestials. He suggested that Subramania appear as Kumarila Bhatta to propagate Mimamsa, Brahma as Mandana Misra and Narayana as Padmapada. According to Annadagiri, Sankara constituted five pontificial seats. In his Soundarya Lahari, he calls himself a child of Dravidadesa (Dravida Sisu).

Sankara took to "Sanyasa" while young toured extensively prescribed an eclectic form of worship, and composed innumerable works – in prose and verse, all of which are marked by depth of devotion **(Sri. S. Venkatesa Sastrigal)**

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38. Where there is no room for hatred

The conduct of men, particularly in respect of their religious fervour, has been divided into three categories. Some men who are absolutely unconcerned about the need to arrange their activities properly and in a disciplined manner are compared to pebbles in a well, which get dry the moment they are thrown on the surface. The second type of men are likened to dolls stuffed with cotton which when dipped in water get bloated and when dry, resume their original form. These men may assimilate scriptural knowledge when taught but may relapse into the humdrum life after a time. The third classification is like camphor which shoots into flames in the very presence of a lighted matchstick. Man should start the process of God realization with self-introspection. This will lead him to develop desirelessness and detachment. With these two traits, he can face problems and get over them. He should conduct himself like a bee that collects honey very carefully from the lilies in the pond. The frog that remains in the water may not know the flowers usefulness or their fragrance.

Swami Ramakrishna has referred to the attitude that a man has to cultivate –treat a gold coin and a potsherd alike. Lure of the lucre or of lust should not disturb him. One who wants to reach the goal of salvation should not hate any religion. A person can reach the first floor of his house either by climbing the steps or by using rope or through an escalator. God too can be approached in different ways. Religion is like the cotton inside a pillow: only the covers are changed. Each can pursue his religion but god is one, this is the catholic outlook of Hinduism where there is no scope for hatred, according to Swami Ramakrishna, said Sri N. Giridhari Prasad in a discourse. The man who entrusts himself to God can go about his duties without any hindrance even as a temporary visitor to a city keeps his luggage in safe custody in a cloakroom before his sight-seeing trip. "Do your duty sincerely but never presume that you have done it. Remember the unseen guidance of God", were the words of the saint.

(Sri N. Giridhari Prasad)

39. Narayana Guru's vision of human fraternity

Anyone who has gone through the stanzas of the ancient Saivite scripture, the Thirumandiram, would be familiar with the profound saying of its author, Thirumoolar, that there is only one race and only one God. This statement came thousands of years ago but in recent times, a scholar and a Godly soul, who distilling the various old writings, spelt out an equally stirring message – "One God, one religion and one caste" – for the humanity. This universal concept of life to realise the supreme nature of the Absolute (God) was prescribed by Sri Narayana Guru who disapproved the distinction between man and man based on caste, creed or race. He lived from 1855 AD to 1928 AD.

Sri Narayana Guru, a visionary and a social reformer, who worked for the promotion of the welfare of the downtrodden, was also well versed in the various branches of the Sanskrit and Tamil scriptural literature. He thus stood as a symbol of harmony, synthesis and "one world". Each person may belong to a particular religion but, he said, Truth, brotherhood, love and kindliness are inherent in every religion. The goal before everyone is also common, viz., Advaita. Lord Krishna's acting as charioteer of His disciple Arjuna is a remarkable example of His compassion. In one of his works, he laid great emphasis on this factor of kindness and mercy as the guiding emphasis on this factor of kindness and mercy as the guiding stars of life. The Guru understood the social and spiritual necessities of the common people and he awakened humanity by propagating the glory of both god and man and spreading the message that all religious led people to the same end.

In a lecture, Pandit V. Natesan said, this illustrious leader who initiated a non-violent social transformation is remembered because he made the world different fro what it was when he was growing. His mission was to dismantle the walls of distinction and build a world based on unity. "Be good, let anything be your

religion", he declared, with one foot in the sands of philosophic speculation and the other poised on the promontory of the vision of human fraternity. Sri Narayana Guru could be aptly called the prophet of a religion that goes beyond all warring faiths. Religion should be an integral part of man's growth and man should be identified as part and parcel of the vast human family.

Sri Narayana Guru, who hailed from Kerala, consecrated several temples and opened many schools and established the Sivagiri Math at Varkala in 1904. One landmark in his life was the formation of the S.N.D.P. Yogam. He faced oppositions from some quarters in propagating his mission, but he held no grudge against them. **(Pandit V. Natesan)**

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40. Nammazhwar's yearning

Anything associated with Sri Narayana is pleasing to the Azhwars and anything unrelated to Him is disliked by them. The lord, who wants humanity to have the benefit of Nammazhhwar's Tiruvoimozhi, chose not to grant his request to be freed from Agnana, Karma, and the mortal coil, till he (Nammazhwar) has finished the work. To make him forget his yearning for moksha, at least momentarily, the Lord revealed, one by one, His innumerable auspicious attributes, which enthralled him, Nammazhwar, lost in the blissful experience, sang His glory but soon renewed his request.

Sri. K. Varadachariar said in his exposition of the 68th verse, which begins with "Maya Vaamamane" that Nammazhwar was completely at a loss to understand why the Lord has not taken him to His feet, eventhough he has expressed his desire to get liberated from samsara. When he came to know that the Lord wants to have His desire to be fulfilled through him, Nammazhwar wondered why he should have been chosen for the job, when there are many Maharishis reputed for their Brahma Gnana. Instead of giving a direct answer to the Azhwar's question, the

Lord revealed His magnificent and gigantic form pervading the entire universe. The Lord chose to sidetrack the question because He was keen that Nammazhwar should complete his monumental work uninterruptedly. In this context, the lecture drew a comparison from the Mahabharata where Sri Krishna evades two of the three questions of Duryodhana as to why He had taken food in the house of Vidura, disregarding Bhisma, Drona and himself. The Lord gave the reason for his not to dining with Duryodhana, leaving the other two queries unanswered. The Lord disregarded Duryodhana because he was unrighteous.

Sri Varadhachariar said Sri Krishna's ways of manifesting Himself are indescribable. When Akrura was taking Sri Krishna and Balarama to the court of Kamsa at the latter's bidding, he saw the vision of Sri Narayana reclining on Adishesha on the surface of Jamuna waters, where he had gone to perform his mid-day ablutions. The puzzled Akrura looked back at the chariot, where he saw the two divine children as he had left them. Such is the "Maya" of the Lord. **(Sri Varadhachariar)**

41. Privilege and greatness of periazhwar

Steeped in Divine ecstasy, devotees often exhibit excessive affection towards God, when they tend to forget the Supreme's real identity and that He is the sole refuge of all creations. (This is based on the rule "Ati sneha papa sankhi"). On such occasions, they show an anxiety for God's personal welfare and offer prayers even blessings for His safety. Vishnuchitta was the first of the Azhwars to sing benedictory verses for the protection of the Lord from the effects of evil eyes cast by human beings, when He paid a visit to this world and wished Him long life ("Pallandu"). He thus earned the title as the foremost among the galaxy of the apostles—Periazhwar.

Sri. K.V. Santhanagopalachariar dealing with the life of the saint in his discourse said God sent His aides to reform mankind, to instill in them the spirit of devotion, inculcate knowledge about Divinity and make them seek the path of

Eternity. Himself an incarnation of Garuda, Vishnuchitta who lived in Srivilliputhur, engaged in service to God, was commanded in his dream to participate in a contest arranged by the Pandyan King to expound who among the Gods was Supreme and which was the easiest and most effective way to reach Him. Despite his plea of lack of erudition, by sheer grace of God, words started pouring out and he advanced arguments to establish the greatness of Sri Narayana. He explained the significance of pranava (Om) and Dvayamantra and how the Almighty was ready to grant us salvation if we surrendered at His feet.

As he was taken in a procession, seated on an elephant, after winning the prize (a bundle of gold coins), Sri Vishnu mounted on Garuda, made His glory. Placing himself in the position of Yasoda, Periazhwar composed several verses (Pasurams) about Sri Krishna's childhood days, elaborately dealing with His pranks, pastimes and miracles. He had also the unique privilege of becoming the father-in-law of Sri Ranganatha when the foster-daughter Andal married Him.

(Sri. K.V. Santhanagopalachariar).

42. Importance of Acharya's guidance

Though God is the ultimate authority to grant salvation (Moksham) to a devotee, yet the method of approach to obtain the same can be shown only by an Acharya-the intermediary who represents the Almighty and who by his special intellectual equipment is able to dispel the disciple's spiritual ignorance and make him experience eternal bliss. His initiation will help the penitent soul to discard what is to be detested and pursue what is desirable. The Acharya is the link between the individual and the Cosmic soul. He lights the torch of wisdom in his disciple and sees that it burns continuously and also encourages him to accumulate any amount of wealth of wisdom. While even God's direct message relating to redemption may be forgotten, the sublime teachings, commentaries on God's postulates philosophic tenets and doctrines spelt out by the Acharyas are still in tact. The three great preceptors Sankara, Madhwa and Ramanuja have

toiled, only to take us on the right path and to get us released from the cycle of birth and death. A spiritual leader's guidance is absolutely necessary even as a lotus requires the Sun's rays to blossom. Artificial heat will not make it bloom unless it is in its natural state, the stalk dipped in water and the bud looking up to the Sun. God realization is possible only with Acharya association.

Srimath Andavan in a discourse referred to the immense benefit a devotee derives and transformation he undergoes by his association with pious men and saints. His Holiness illustrated how a disciple, with unflinching faith in his Acharya's powers, while crossing a river was able to save himself from the sudden surging floods by meditating on his Guru. An Acharya's greatest trait is his concern for his disciple's wellbeing and the eagerness with which he will enable him to have peeps into mysticism. A sishya can repay his debt of gratitude to his master, though his services cannot be adequately compensated, by adhering to the norms set by him and upholding the traditions.

(Srimath Andavan)

43. Body-soul tieup in Divine service

One of the fundamental lessons to be assimilated from spiritual texts is about the permanent bond between God and His creations. The human body is a precious gift given by God and hence man is bound to express his gratitude for His noble gesture. Within each body, a soul has been housed and as such, both should submit themselves to the Divine benefactor and be at His service at all times. There should be a great thirst to serve Him so as to keep alive the bond.

Nammazhwar, whose contribution to religion and devotional literature through his hymn "Thiruvoimozhi" in 1,000 verses, forming part of 4,000 of all 12 Azhwars (called Nalayira Divya Prabhandam), explains the nature of this link in one of the verses. The universe, with all its sentient and non-sentient beings, is to be considered as God's body. This means He is immanent and resides within each one of His creations. As the motivating

force enshrined in each one, He directs all their activities. The individual soul and the body should therefore take all efforts to please Him through ardent continuous service, says another verse of the apostle.

In a discourse, Sri Sriman Narayana Jeeyer Swami (of Vijayawada) explained the Doctrine of soul-body tieup and the consequent need to attend on Him with dedication, by referring to the statements in the Upanishads. The motto of Divine service can be illustrated by the anxiety displayed by a spiritual leader. After conducting a religious rite, the leader's disciple collected the remaining articles but since a dog had consumed a jaggery-ball, the total fell short. The former was not happy, though the performer of the rite was ready to replace it. The Acharya said what was lost could not be regained.

Likewise, saints regret the time wasted even in the past, in not worshipping God. Of course, their assurance to be at His command now and in the future is there for ever. When devotees are engaged in serving God, their attention would not be diverted in showing jealousy, hatred, passion, ego and other evils, which arise out of the free-play of the Senses. They may not see God directly but that He is the in-dweller can surely be experienced. The Prahlada episode reveals that He pervades the entire universe and can present Himself from any object. The cultivation of the idea that all have originated from God will put an end to mutual strife and petty feuds. Ambition there can be for anyone, but it should be contained within limits.

(Sri Sriman Narayana Jeeyer Swami.)

44. Greatness of Vedanta Desika

The tirade against religious traditions has been in existence for a long time and regretfully some members of the Hindus themselves had taken the lead to deride some of the ancient customs. Spiritual leaders and devotees had tried to combat these onslaughts. For instance, even 700 years ago, the Ranganatha idol in Srirangam was sought to be stolen by

marauders but timely action by an eminent scholar resulted in its being removed to a distant place and reinstalled when the threat receded.

Even now few seek to know why when their help was indented for the construction of the temple, they were prevented from entering the sanctum sanctorium. They should be made aware that even from a particular community from which the priests are chosen, all cannot get into this holy place. They too should join only the masses.

The glorious and dazzling image of Ranganatha was rescued by Vedanta Desika whose contribution to Vaishnavism and its philosophy is prolific and phenomenal. In his days, religious bigotry was a rampant and a ruler even caused the gouging of the eyes of a saintly man as he would not subscribe to his views. “Desika” is a term applicable to all preceptors but even as Gita refers only to Bhagavad Gita and Sahasranamam indicates the praise on Visjnu, Desika will mean only Vedanta Desika. He has written poems, dramas, stotras, philosophic treatises and Gadyams. A boy prodigy, his precocity was in evidence when he was hardly 5 or 6 by helping scholars to continue the Vedic recitation left unfinished earlier. As a child, he was called Venkatanandha.

Sri Arvamudan, in a discourse, said the Divine couple Ranganatha and Ranganayaki admiring his scholastic and other excellence awarded the titles of Sarva Thanthra Swatantra and Kavitharkika Simham. During one night, he composed 1000 verses on Lord’s Padukas but even then, out of humility, he said his capacity could be compared to that of a pig’s which yields many litters whereas the erudition of his rivals’ (though defeated in the contest) was akin to that of the only calf given birth by an elephant. His detachment to worldly activities was such that even when his close associate Vidyaranya, who occupied a coveted post in Vijayanagar kingdom, invited him to receive gifts, he declined stating that he had been left with an enviable legacy in the form of Lord Varadaraja of Kancheepuram. In one hymn, Vedanta Desika has detailed the nine steps to heaven. He had mastery over Tamil and had written numerous Tamil works proving his proficiency in “Ubhaya Vedanta”. **(Sri Arvamudan)**

45. Manavala Maamunigal, an apostle of God

Even as God takes incarnations to re-establish Moral Order when there are signs of deterioration, He sends His apostles sometimes to enlighten and elevate the erring humanity from the mire of mundane existence. This He does by imparting them the true significance of the scriptures. These Divine messengers inspire people to do service to the Almighty and uphold His commands, ultimately enabling them to reach His abode of eternal peace and joy. Among such illustrious representative was Varavara Muni in the south, well-known as Manavala Maamunigal (1370-1443 Ad). Among his works for posterity is a brilliant commentary on the manual of Srivaishnavism called Srivachanabushanam.

Ramanuja, who propagated the Visishtadvaita philosophy, had clearly established that the Supreme God is full of auspicious qualities. He had made it obligatory that the hymns of the Azhwars (called the Divya Prabhandam) should also be recited along with Sanskrit scriptures. He codified certain rituals in temple worship and His disciple continued the task. Ramanuja reappeared as Manavala Maamunigal who is considered to be the last of the early religious preceptors who occupied the pontific seat of Ramanuja at Srirangam.

In one of his verses, Manavala Maamunigal says he was fortune enough to have received the grace of Lord Ranganatha while residing in Srirangam and to have studied the works of Nammazhwar which served as nourishment, to his soul. He was also lucky to digest, understand and assimilate the teachings of Azhwars and Acharyas. He was free from envy. Admiring Varavara Muni’s depth and learning, the illustrious teacher, Srisailesa, trained him to succeed to the pontific seat. He got ordained into ascetic order and was given the name of Manavala Maamunigal by Lord Ranganatha Himself who also directed that the Pallavarayan Math be made his residence.

In a lecture, Dr. M.A. Venkatakrishnan said that many celebrated Acharyas of the day became Manavala Maamunigal's disciples, one of them being the Vanamamalai Ramanuja Jeeyar, the founder of Thothadri Math. Again, as commanded by Lord Ranganatha (through the priest), he expounded Thiruvoimozhi, based on the five earlier commentaries, for one full-year and the Lord appearing as a boy sang a verse in his praise (recited even now) and disappeared. Sri Manavala Maamunigal entrusted the task of spreading Ramanuja philosophy to eight of his followers. The Acharya has explained the efficacy of the Doctrine of Surrender, the nature of the devotee who submits himself at the feet of the Lord, the Do's and Donts' for him and devotion to be shown to spiritual teacher. (Dr. M.A. Venkatakrishnan)

46. Seek God as life is ephemeral

The rare privilege conferred by God on human beings is the golden opportunity to practice spiritual exercises. Out of His extreme compassion to help them get out of the quagmire of the worldly bonds, He has provided several methods to acquire knowledge by which they can understand the nature of their own Self, their links with the Lord, their goal and the means to reach it. At every stage, they are reminded of the ephemerality of their existence.

The principle message about the relationship between God, man and the world is spelt out in the Vedic revelations. Since they are terse, their elaborations in Epics was made available. Subsequently expositions of sages were placed before them. Later, Codes of conduct were written and principles of moral life were pronounced through saintly personalities. When even these were not sufficient, the mystical outpourings of holy men in their hymn were written down which helped men to lead lives of moral purity.

The main stress in all these scriptural works is that they should do only good and carry out their duties without being motivated by a desire to obtain the fruits. Also, their deeds should

be to please the Almighty. The soul-stirring hymns of Divine bards known as the "Azhwars", are called Divya Prabhandam. They glorify the auspicious attributes of the Almighty and how He rescues men, who cling to Him, from the worldly tentacles. Theses Tamil songs are also called Dramidopanishad. That such saints will be contributing to the aspirants' spiritual needs at a later stage, had been anticipated long ago by Sage Vyasa, who in his Bhagavatahm visualised the birth of God-men like Nammazhwar and other mystics at various places in Tamil Nadu.

Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar in a discourse, referred to a psalm in which an Azhwar compares the human body to a house whose walls have been built by flesh, supported by pillar columns made of bones and the entire structure held firm by the nerves. This decaying dwelling house has nine exits. To avoid getting entangled in earthy life, the saints have recommended that man should seek refuge in God, mingle only with men of piety and utter the Lord's names constantly, which will purify the mind and ensure detachment from activities which pull in different directions.

The repetition of the name Rama will result in moral uprightness. That is the reason why Ravana, who had abducted Sita did not dare to approach Her, by dressing himself as Rama because the moment he donned such a garb, his mind would automatically resist indulging in any misconduct.

(Sri Mukkur Lakshminarasimhachariar).

47. Serve God with total surrender

Religion offers solace to a man in his trails and tribulations in this world. It suggests that the lasting and final solution to difficulties is to surrender completely to God. In many cases, an individual has an innate feeling that he fails to realise his limitations. Only the experience of the vicissitudes of life will force him to know that he was to rely on some Supreme Power which possesses full strength and compassion to help him. Man's only way to achieve peace and happiness is to unreservedly throw himself on the grace of such a Supreme Power, viz, God.

No doubt, several vistas are open to man but because of his limitations, the paths of action, wisdom and devotion will prove arduous. The only foolproof choice is “Surrender”, a method that is easily available to anyone who seeks asylum in Him and entertains absolute confidence that His protection will never fail. The most important requirement is “Confidence” that God shall be with him always.

In return for his total dependence on Him, God has given a firm assurance that His declaration to extend His protection to devotees is unalterable. The clarion call of the Lord to His devotees is contained in the Ramayanam, Mahabharatham and Varaha Puranam. He has unequivocally vowed that His pledge is to give refuge to anyone who acknowledges his helplessness before God.

Having thus known about the nature of the Lord that He is matchless and has unrestricted powers, a devotee should remember about his link and relationship with God, that he is a mere slave. The Azhwars and Acaryas have clearly stated that the bond between the Almighty and a devotee should be strengthened. While surrendering, one should pray that all obstacles be removed to reach the goal, viz, to serve the Divine couple in Srivaikuntam permanently.

In a discourse, Sri. R. Madhavachariar said, that there is no guarantee that the Lord may straightway condone all the penitent’s blemishes because of the magnitude of his sins. To help the aspirant, the Divine Mother is ever gracious to recommend such a sincere person to the Lord. The Ramayana illustrates how in order to fulfill the purpose of their incarnations (To establish the efficacy of Surrender), the marriage of the Divine couple was brought about after Rama’s study. Subsequent to Surrender, he must be at the service of the Lord. How to serve the Lord has been portrayed through the anxiety shown by Lakshmana to remain ever vigilant. Scriptures also hold that the preceptor alone has the capacity to lead an aspirant towards God. Lakshmana symbolizes ‘service’ to God and an Acharya makes God overlook disciple’s sins.

(Sri. R. Madhavachariar)

48. Right company enhances devotion

The Thiruppavai of Andal occupies a unique place among the various compositions enshrined in the Nalayira Divya Prabhandam which is a collection of the works of the Alwars of the Srivaishnava tradition. The only woman mystic exalted to the status of an Alwar, Andal is also known as Goda and Sudikkodutha Sudarkodi, She poured out her Divine love in two works – Thiruppavai and Nachiar Thirumozhi.

In the collection of 30 verses of the Thiruppavai which is in the form of a call to fellow devotees. Andal urges them to overcome spiritual apathy. The month in which she had chosen to perform a vow along with her friends is the Margasirsa, important spiritually. She recreates Gokula were Lord Krishna performed His childhood sports, in the lanes of her village Srivilliputtur, where she lived in the house of her foster father.

In the opening verses of the hymns till the fifth one, the goal to be attained – eternal service to the Lord- is mentioned and the succeeding verses until the fifteenth one, there is a stirring progression in the enactment of the vow, the young maidens awakening one another to proceed together to the house of Nanda. The maidens mentioned in the verses are interpreted esoterically by the commentators of the tradition to refer to the other Alwars, whose association she seeks in her spiritual progress to attain divine communion.

In his discourse Sri Andavan Swami said, the importance of the company of devotees of God is emphasised in the Thiruppavai. In the last among the hymns in which the girls awaken their mates, there is an exchange of words between the maiden getting ready for the vow. The girl who is awakened being an ardent devotee allows herself to be blamed for the improper drift in the conversation when they jest with one another, which shows that she is aware of the sanctity of the spiritual goal.

Awareness of one’s shortcomings is a trait found only in a mature seeker of God and to accept the blame for the lapse of

other fellow devotees is indeed a remarkable quality. In spite of her submission, her friends tease and admonish her for the delay in joining them, which is a test to find out whether she is established in her spiritual nature.

And it is with great élan that this maiden who is awakened last, enquires whether the others have all come. This is interpreted to show her eagerness to meet other devotees. Commentators in this context interpret the importance of seeking pious company for spiritual progress. The last girl to be awakened is a reference to Thirumangai Azwar who is chronologically placed last among the Azwars. **(Sri Andavan Swami)**

49. A revolutionary spiritual guide

A traditionalist by conviction, with revolutionary ideas, faithful to ancient teachings, moderate in criticism and benevolent to all his disciple –these sum up the merits of one of our greater path-finders and an impeccable spiritual guide, Sri Ramanuja. The themes of devotion and surrender to God, which are essential to his teachings are based to a large extent on the hymns of Azhwars. Even today, the worship of deities at homes and temples, the festivities and religious rites are being carried out according to his writ.

Ramanuja made a request to Lord Varadaraja of Kancheepuram, through his mentor as to how the wishes of Yamunacharya could be carried out. The Lord's reply was: "I am the Supreme Truth; resigning to God (Prapatti) is the means of getting relief from bondage; the individual soul need not think of Me at the time of death; the soul gets final release as soon as it is freed from the body; our faith is Vishistadwaita and choose Mahapurna as your preceptor". Ramanuja's advent in the Vindhya forest when he had to flee from the evil machinations of a teacher is a milestone in the extravagant benefactions of the Divine couple.

Ramanuja's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita is a work of great merit and the result of considerable thought. Among his

other works are the Gadyatraya and the Nitya, devoted to practical religious chores. Inscriptional evidence shows that Ramanuja stayed at Melkote for 20 years. An important incident in his life was the recovery of the idol "Ramapriya" from Delhi. He followed a long line of Srivaishnava seers who maintained that the Supreme Being is full of auspicious attributes. His system is known as Visishtadwaita which refers to three Realities viz. God, soul and matter, the first alone being independent, the other two dependent on Him.

In his discourse on the occasion of Ramanuja Jayanthi, Sri. R. Kannan Swamigal referred to the details of the Doctrine of Prapatti (Saranagati or Self-surrender) to the Lord in which He is resorted to as the sole refuge. Ramanuja was an exemplary character without parallel and various incidents in his life bring out his broad-mindedness, burning sympathy for mankind, his unselfishness to an extraordinary degree, resourcefulness and absolute devotion to God. An able interpreter of the human heart, he won men and women of different temperaments to the path of religion by his sympathetic attitude.

With his administrative acumen, Ramanuja laid down rules and procedures for temple administration. According to him, there is no distinction between high and low, between the so-called touchable and untouchables, in the quest for Divine grace. Three idols of his have been installed in three temples.

(Sri. R. Kannan Swamigal).

50. God indwells in His creations

Under certain exigencies, like facing virtual extinction, a devotee may take a vow to observe a stringent measure of austerity to come out of the situation. Answering his appeal, god is sure to save him. Subsequently the devotee may forget to carry out his resolve but the Lord will remind him by some means. God knows what transpires in the mind of every creation as He is an indweller in each one of them. Scriptural testimony points out that all our actions are noticed by 14 celestial witnesses.

While a scholar eager to meet his wife was crossing a river, half-way through, there were flash floods, which at a particular stage were about to drown him. As taking a vow to become a monk (sanyasi) at the last stage of one's life will enable one to get salvation, despair prompted the scholar to become a sanyasi. He was saved from the peril and then was able to reach his spouse's house.

Believing that his act was known to none but himself, he met his wife, who however found a great change in him and saw him in the garb of an anchorite. Confessing the circumstances under which he had pleaded with God, he left her. This devotee later became a saint, Narayana Theertha, who migrated from his birthplace in Guntur to a place in the Cauvery basin.

He settled in Varahur, composed a poem which chronicled all the episodes in Lord Krishna's life as contained in the Srimad Bhagavatam. For having violated his own resolve, he was punished to suffer from colic pain which vanished as he submitted his prayers to Lord Venkatachalapathi at his place of permanent stay. Not only was he directed to reach Varahur, God ordered him to contribute the hymn with a direction that the verses should be suited not only to be sung but also be lyrically superb for dance. The Lord Himself gave His approval to these songs called Krishna Leela Tharangini. They are extensively handled in the Bhajan tradition.

In his Harikath, Kalyanapuram Sri Aravamudan said saints at times performed miracles not for demonstrating their spiritual powers but only to remove the doubt in some diehards about God's supremacy. Saints have revelled in glorifying the Lord's sports as Krishna because He is easy to be approached and performed the duty of an Acharya and also assumed the roles of a cowherd boy, a messenger and a charioteer, which are considered menial. The episodes covered by the saint mention the consequences of displaying one's powers before God and men remaining ungrateful after receiving various benefits from Him.

(Harikath, Kalyanapuram Sri Aravamudan).

51. Purandaradasa's renunciation and redemption

Wealth that has come to one's hands must be rededicated for services to God Himself even as water from a reservoir absorbed by the cloud is returned to the same source. The process of developing detachment is however very difficult. Purandaradasa, an eclectic mystic of the 15th century, discarded his entire fortune at the age of 30 to preach the message of God through his music. God revealed Himself before him saving him in a crisis, once again demonstrating that the Almighty would never fail to protect His devotee.

In his discourse Sri Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar said a diamond setter by profession; Purandaradasa accumulated enormous wealth through miserly habits. In the form of an old man God sought from him monetary help for his son's Upanayanam. When there was no response from him, the old man approached his wife and obtained her nose screw and took it away to be sold. When the mystery was cleared, the merchant regretted his past life, renounced his riches, became a disciple of a great spiritual leader and poured out through his music Panduranga's glory.

Purandaradasa's musical pieces – ranging from simple structured Geetams like "Keraeneeranu" to philosophy saturated kirtanas, emit devotional fervour. In one he says there is no use reciting the Bhagavad Gita without acting according to the codes contained therein nor is the observance of religious rites by women of any value when they show disrespect to their husbands.

(Sri Mannargudi Sambasiva Bhagavathar)

52. Thukaram's prayer and percept

Faith sustains the universe. It is possible for anyone to remain a householder discharging his obligations and yet be in constant touch with the Infinite by cultivating the spirit of detachment, meditating on God and visualising Him at all times.

The edifice of Bhakthi should be built on the solid foundation of Virakthi. This can be achieved by association with saints who will teach us how to separate the chaff from the grain. The devotee should endeavour to enshrine God within his heart and imprison Him by binding His lotus feet with the cord of dedication. God responds to His devotee's call in two ways- by depriving him with all affluences, but making him lead a detached life A sincere devotee will bear no ill will towards others, will eschew egoism, remain balanced in pleasure and pain, be ever content and be devoid of all cravings. The example of Thukaram, a walking chapel of God spreading His Gospel, reminds us of the characteristics of a suppliant. His prayer was to keep him ever in the company of virtuous men. He proved that in Kaliyuga, the spontaneous utterance of God's names even amidst family chores is an easy, safe and sure method to realise God. Everyone is entitled tp practise Nama Sankirtana.

Swami Bhadragiri Keshavadas in his discourse said at times, difficulties serve as a blessing in disguise and help a person to obtain spiritual enlightenment and Tukaram's wife virtually drove him nearer to God. As a forlorn child lost in the formidable forest of Samsara, seeking God's asylum, he submitted that he possessed no wisdom, knew no scriptures and was whipped by ego. To him, Panduranga emerged from the stone image.

(Swami Bhadragiri Keshavadas)

53. Influence of Saints

Saints influence their disciple in an unobtrusive and ineffable manner. Their sole mission in life is to forgive our foolish ways and make us return to God. Living in their very company will prove an antidote in an age of attrition like ours. It is through them that Divine light filters down into the world of darkness. Being channels of spiritually, the world will be a blind place but for their presence. They provide us faith and confidence in an hour of crisis and inspire hope in us when we have doubts. When we are lost in resentment and haste, they call us back to the path of love and service. They may be gentle but are never weak; appear determined but are not aggressive. They keep us pure and disinfected.

Sri Raghavendra, one of the greatest of Madhwa saints, represented the most outstanding elements of "Adwaita" philosophy by his works and pious life. He combined in himself several excellences, immense popularity, phenomenal erudition, an author of distinction, subtle grammarian and a fine player of veena. Appreciating his scholarship, Sudhindra Thirtha desired to ordain him as his successor pontiff. Tradition records that Saraswati appeared in Sri Raghvendra's dream and asked him to serve the cause of Indian philosophy through his commentaries on Sri Madhwa's works and those of his successors, Jaya Thirtha and Vyasaraja. Taking Sanyasa when he was 23, Sri Raghavendra turned a missionary and lived an austere life presiding over the Math (Kumbakonam) for four decades.

In his discourse Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao said Sri Raghavendra was a noted socio-spiritual benefactor of the distressed humanity and had performed unparalleled miracles. He had provided word-by-word meaning to nine of the Upanishads, helpful even to an average reader. His another notable contribution was a book on the daily religious duties one should do. He vanished into the void but had declared he would continue to be present in his astral bosy for 700 year. His Brindavan (cemetery) in Manthralaya (near Adoni) is a place of pilgrimage, and his disciples believe that he continues to confer boons on them. **(Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao)**

54. Songs of Madhwa bards had direct appeal to masses

"Daasa Koota" (servants and minstrels of God), were a band of chosen men responsible for the awakening of spiritual consciousness among the masses a few centuries ago and who activated them in a quicker way and period than saints well-versed in Sanskrit, who preached God's message through their writings. The songs of these bards has a direct appeal to the average man because the parables and examples quoted therein were drawn from daily occurrences. These compositions in Kannada touched the very heart, stimulated the mind, enlarged the vision and converted even the degenerate into an ardent devotee. The Daasa Koota's

verses also enriched the Kannada literature. One among the distinguished singer-saints of the 17-18th century of this Madhwa tradition, commencing from Purandaradasa, was Vijayadasa. Like Raghavendra, he was a victim of chill penury and suffered the pangs of agony even while young and went to Varanasi to earn and discharge the debts of his ancestors. But grief did not affect his spiritual pursuits and in this task, he was inspired by his mother.

In his discourse, Sri N. Nagaraja Rao said, the saint, commanded by Purandaradasa in a dream, composed over 25,000 soul-stirring songs, declaring the supremacy of Lord Narayana and the greatness of Sri Madhwa, displaying the spirit of ser5vant before his master. The songs of Dasas were not merely musically excellent but proclaimed the attributes, glory and exploits of God. Purandaradasa gave him the insignia (mudra or Ankita) of "Vijaya Vittala". His compositions were technically perfect set to the canons of Carnatic music. They explained the difficult doctrines of Madhwa philosophy in clear Kannada language, Vijayadasa said, for instance, that by grace of God, a tiger could be turned into a mouse, a jackal made a hen, and the influence of Kali (who afflicts the present era) could be effaced. In his village (Chikalaparavi) near Guntakal, on a sacred space specially dedicated to Vijayadasa, the tambura used by him and the manuscripts of his songs are being worshipped on a specific day in the month of "Karthika".

(Sri N. Nagaraja Rao).

55. Do your duty and offer it to God

Living amidst confusion the modern man experiences a crisis, resulting from a total loss of faith in religion and moral values. He becomes a psychological captive, blind to all things which transcend the confines of his sense horizon. He fails to realise that the empirical goals of life – power, pleasure, affluence and success –are not the ends which will satisfy him totally. To escape boredom and inanity, he flies into undesirable regions.

A philosopher who was wandering reached a public park. A sentry asked him who he was and why he was there "I wish to know it" was the reply, which exactly reflects the plight of man. It is in this context that saints and sages have come to live in our midst, and suggest methods to secure us relief, Sri Madhwacharya bemoans the state of existence of the un-regenerate man and beckons him to cultivate faith in God.

In a discourse, Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao said Sri Madhwa reiterates the Gita doctrine of "Swadharma" discrediting a life of laziness. He insists that one should perform one's duties as an offering to God. While so doing, one should regard himself as an instrument or agent of God. According to him, it is not enough for one to contemplate the Lord, seeking individual salvation unmindful of the social agonies of fellow beings.

Sri Madhwacharya, founder of Dwaita philosophy, says that God does not create the world once, leaving it to its destiny as the deists hold. He is the continuing cause of all the activities of man and movement in matter. He is the Foreman who runs the machines that we are. The purpose of creation by the Lord is to enable individual souls to work out their salvation. He prescribes "Bhakti" as the supreme method to attain the Lord.

The worship of the Almighty should be conducted in a proper manner. Sri Madhwacharya pleads with us to lead a life of purity as this will enable us to meditate on the Supreme Being. Devotion and duty import meaning into human life and infuse purpose into it. **(Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao).**

56. Lure of money causes grief

A saint of the 14th century, after fulfilling God's command, had his peaceful, final sleep. His body was kept covered with a cloth. There was controversy whether it should be cremated or buried because he was believed to be a Muslim preaching Lord Rama's message. As the quarrel persisted, an incorporeal voice asked the parties to remove the cloth. To their surprise there was only a flower there, which the groups divided and on them arose a temple and a mosque.

The Saint, Kabirdas, is considered the manifestation of Suka and he stood as the symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. His

famous song referred to the Hindus calling God as "Alakniranjan" while Muslims terming Him as "Ya-Khuda". The Hindus usually cremated the body while latter buried it, when it turns respectively to ash and mud. Can anyone at a later stage distinguish the Hindu dust and the Muslim earth? "Forget the animosity and sing about Sita-Ram", Kabir advised the clans.

Swami Kesavadas in a discourse said Kabir's songs are full of philosophic import and truths about the Reality. "People rush after happiness which eludes them. The process brings misery. Lure of the money and lust push them into grief. But if they 'loot' the imperishable kingdom of the Lord Rama, they can become the wealthiest. I am a beggar but am now the richest since I robbed the Nama-Bhandara, the treasury of God's names", Kabirdas said.An orphan, he was brought up by a Muslim couple. Thrice when the parents opened the holy book, they came across the word Kabir, meaning, "The greatest". He was initiated by a Hindu saint Ramananda, under strange circumstances. As the saint was returning from his ablutions in the Ganga in the early hours, young Kabir prostrated on the stone step. The feet of the guru touched the boy's head and he was "enlightened". Immediately he burst into exuberance: "The dust of the Guru's acts as a collyirium to find out the hiding Lord Rama in our hearts". He had a doubt about the process involved in grinding foodgrain. He was told that the stone that rotated on the top represented the sky and the base, the earth and the grain, all creations. **(Swami Kesavadas)**

57. God transcends caste factors

Can anyone identify God as belonging to any particular caste? Does the "soul" which He creates and is permanent has any community? The Almighty can decide and act according to His will and confer boons on men or deprive them of their possessions and mortals have to submit to His commands. God's devotees belong to different castes and He never considers the same a criterion in extending His mercy. Several saints have been born in the so-called backward classes but they have stood as symbols of true devotion and absolute detachment.

God is never partial. But He may choose some men to spread His message of Love and Truth. One among them was Kanakadasa. A local chieftain under a ruler of Karnataka, he was charged with the task of holding the torch of devotion by turning a Haridasa (servant of God), go about singing compositions containing God's merciful qualities and deeds and make people cultivate detachment. But Kanakadasa refused saying that he was not duly qualified, that he had no spiritual knowledge and that he hailed from a low caste. God saw to it that he became a messenger after forcing him go through severe tests and ordeals.

Sri. V.S. Venkataramana Rao in a discourse referred to the treasure that Kanakadasa struck and the temple he erected for Adikesava utilising the amount. There was protest from the orthodox sections of people against his devotional activities but later they revised their views. God even deprived Kanakadasa of his kith and kin and property but he still resisted God's invitation. Ultimately, he yielded to God's directive when, thrown off from a horse on the battlefield and he lay unconscious, he was revived by Divine touch. It was a re-birth for him.

In one of his songs with 24 "Charanams", Kankadasa pours out his deep mental anguish. Under God's order, he worshipped Lord Srinivasa in Tirumalai where he submitted a strange request to the deity: "I must see you perform a dance, to the song rendered by Anjaneya, the rhythm maintained by Lord Siva and Brahma playing the drum". Kanakadasa was blessed by Vyasaraja and Purandaradasa. **(Sri. V.S. Venkataramana Rao).**

58. Manifestation of Divine love

Devotion to God flowers into several varieties. Among those who wish to discard worldly pleasures and reach God's abode, some treat Him with reverance, wondering whether He is approachable at all. There are mystical personalities who place themselves as brides and the Lord as the bridegroom and display their concern of remaining separated, ever craving for early reunion. Such rare devotees know that worldly attachment and dedication to God cannot go together.

In turn, God feels that His only duty is to await the call of those persons in distress, rush to their rescue and provide instantaneous relief. One of the basic methods of inculcating spiritual discipline is to train children and make them listen to God's powers and His qualities of mercy and grace. The parents, who alone are genuinely interested in their wards, will tender proper advice but at times it may be unpalatable. It will do them good in the long run and make them worthy citizens.

Listening to the devotional lectures when glorious episodes connected with God were being narrated and imagining the small idol of Lord Krishna presented to her as having "life", a young girl developed so much of attachment to it that she kept it with her forever. She used to converse with the same and draw comfort. This was the girl who later grew up to be the famed devotee –Meera who totally identified herself with Lord Krishna.

In a discourse, Sri. B. Sivaramakrishna Sarma said, Meera married a ruler much against her wish. She was made to face several problems but took them as God's work and tackled them with a smile. Her mother-in-law herself hated her because Meera worshipped Sri Krishna in preference to Lord Siva. She caused another woman to spy her activities and sowed the seeds of discord and suspicion in the mind of Meera's husband. Her religious congregations used to attract even the then king. After sometime, Meera's husband realised that she was a messenger of God and helped her to pursue her Divine work and even built a temple for the Lord she adored, Meera used to go into raptures by rendering devotional songs praising "Giridhar Gopal". Ultimately, Meera settled in Brindavan, a place connected with the Lord's younger days and merged with Him, providing yet another proof that God never fails but helps His devotees, who have deep faith in Him, to achieve success. **(Sri. B. Sivaramakrishna Sarma)**

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59. Shastras to be followed in temple construction

Though God has not been seen by ordinary human beings, His different forms, as He resides in heaven or when He manifested in the world to save the virtuous form the attacks by the wicked, have been portrayed by saints and sages in their literacy masterpieces as He had revealed His vision to them – directly or in other ways. His glorious features have been presented to humanity as idols installed in temples.

Apart from the religious purpose they serve, the idols are not made from ordinary granites. The texts on scripture spell out the nature of the stones to be chosen. There are three types, each identified by tapping them, judging the sound and by their weight. The male stones are used for chiseling the idols, the female ones to form their base and neuters, to be used as the "steps". The icon also require great care while being cast.

The details connected with the construction of temples (the nature of the soil, direction, etc.,) the selection of the stones, of metals and other procedures connected with their installation have been presented to us by Acharya Sri Madhwa in one of his works called Tantrasara. In a discourse explaining the contents of this rare text, Sri. B.E. Nagendraprasad said the book's contents deal with the correct method of respiration adopted while conducting the religious rites, of performing the various sacrifices (Yagnams), including the measurements of the altar, the selection of twigs to be offered to the flames, the deities to be invoked, the honour to be extended to the priest who carries out the purificatory rituals, and about the nature of the incantations and meditation in these ceremonies, on various forms of deities. The modes of prayers to be offered to the retinue of the Lord have also been discussed. Sri Madhwacharya hs enumerated the method of sanctifying the icons, the 16 types of offering worship and the oblations to be given to various presiding deities. The Acharya has given the expansion and the components of the primary mantra (called Pranavam) and the Lord's chief sublime characteristics.

(Sri. B.E. Nagendraprasad)

60. Time-table for daily religious routine

For man's safe journey through life, our seers and saints have prescribed a schedule of duties, daily and compulsory, which when performed with sincerity and as acts of dedication to God, will fetch a man the moral strength to withstand the impact of even powerful influence.

Carried out to show his gratitude to God for His mercy, these religious exercises will set the aspirant on the path of liberation, which should be the goal of right-thinking sections of humanity. Even as giant machines will remain idle when electricity fails, so too when the Lord's grace is not sought, man's life becomes purposeless. Man is called upon to perform his duties at all times. If they are done without acknowledgement to God, they will become non-productive here and hereafter: they may also lead a oerson to netherworld.

To educate his followers, Sri Madhwacharya has written a work called "Sadaschara Smriti", based on Vyasa's mightier treatise on the subject. From the time a devoted individual rises from bed till he retires for the day, a time-table has been worked out and suitable directions given therein. No one is exempt from these injunctions and by discharging these pious obligations, a person can show the correct way for others to follow, Sri. B.E. Nagendraprasad explained in a discourse, analysing the subjects dealt with this great work by Sri Madhwacharya.

Even though one knows the role of water, flowers and Salagramams (stone-like idols), the background for their proper use in worship have been told in the Smriti. Man should not feel that his duty ends with the performance of daily worship to icons. Since the Lord resides in the hearts of everyone, his aim should be to visualise that Divine form in all others. The reading of scriptures and teaching them to others too constitute a noble sacrifice. Sri Madhwacharya lived strictly in accordance with the commands, which have the support of sages who were well-versed about God's forms, traits and nature.

(Sri. B.E. Nagendraprasad).

61. Utterances of saints will come true

That the utterances of saints, who are none else than God's deputies, are not only carefully weighed but will come true, has been proved through several instances in religious history. Their statements carry great import as they have been spelt out following the acquisition of spiritual powers through intense austerities.

Once a woman prostrated before a spiritual leader who blessed her with a child. She submitted that this was impossible as her husband was old and was in his death bed. There was a big gap in their ages as she was the second wife. The saint said what he said came out at Lord Krishna's indirect command. He reiterated that a child would certainly be born but imposed a condition that it should be handed over to him to succeed him as the Head of the Monastery. When the couple were stunned, the preceptor told them that they could give the child to him only if it was born outside their house. Divine intervention resulted in the woman delivering a male child, her husband having recovered from his serious illness. The birth was also away from their home. The saint had it kept in a golden platter, giving it the milk that had been offered to the deity he worshipped. The child grew into an intelligent boy and was administered the oath of an ascetic and later became acknowledged as one of the stout exponents of Sri Madhwacharya's philosophy. He was Vyasaraya and later known as Vyasaraja, controlling a Math in the same name foe several years.

Sri Vidya Payonidhi Thirtha, the present head of this Math, explained how Vyasaraja saved the ruler of the Vijayanagar empire (Krishnadevaraya) from coming under the influence of stellar positions which would have resulted in his death. He took upon himself the responsibility of occupying the throne and scaring away the serpent that came to the palace court, by throwing a garment before it which caught fire.

The exponents of the "Daasas" tradition –Purandara and Kanaka were his disciples, who spread divine glory through bhajan and music. Vyasaraja worshipped Lord Srinivasa in Thirumala for 12 years and built the canopy over the sanctum engraving the figure

of "Vimana Venkatesa" on it. This patron saint of Vijayanagar kingdom defended the system of Madhwacharya, using his logical acumen and staggering knowledge. Evidence of brilliance is seen in his numerous works particularly the Tatparya Chandrika, proving "Hari" is Supreme with auspicious attributes, the world is real and the concept of difference between God, soul and matter. One of the eight fist-fulls of sacred earth brought by Madhwacharya is being retained and worshipped in this Math.

(Sri Vidya Payonidhi Thirtha)

62. Elucidation of Vedas: Puranas' value to common man

The Puranas served the purpose of magnifying the subtle truths enshrined in the Vedas and thus making them intelligible to the common man; it was therefore wrong to under-estimate their value, said Sri Kripanandavariar.

In his lecture on Kanda Puranam, Sri Variar said, but for Vyasacharya and his immortal works, Hindu Dharma would have died long ago. There were some forces current in the country that seemed to extinguish the Hindu religion. But, like the Sun, the Hindu religion can never be put out and such atheistic tendencies were only like passing clouds, Skandam, the biggest among the ten 18 Puranas, occupied the pride of place among the ten devoted to Saiva Siddhanta. It was because Lord Subramanya (known as Gnana Panditha) Himself is believed to have corrected the work, when its author, Sri Kachiyappa Sivachariar, left the written stanzas in His shrine every night. Well-versed in Sanskrit and Tamil, Sri Kachiappa lived in Kanchipuram and was an archaka by profession. He undertook to sing Skandam in Tamil, as ordained by Lord Subrahmanya, and wrote six kandas.

As was customary among Tamil poets, Sri Kachiappa also sang the praise of the river that made the land of his writing fertile, namely the Palar. The author compares the falling of rain from the dark clouds on the Nandi Hills (the place of origin of the Palar) to the spitting of water on the Sivalinga (Sri Kalathiappar) by the

dark complexioned archer, Thinnan (an ardent Siva Bhaktha who came to be known as Kannappa Nayanr). Answering critics who asked if it was proper to offer tasted food to the Lord and do abhisheka with water carried in one's mouth, as Thinnanar did, Sri Variar said the Lord would willingly accept anything offered to Him with true bhakti (devotion). **(Sri Kripanandavariar)**

63. Constant tussle between intellect and emotions

Even men of virtue, who are worthy of public esteem and veneration, are sometimes known to have a vice, or at least a weakness. And, the human tendency is to magnify a blemish found in such a person and speak disparagingly of him rather than praise him for his good traits, which are overwhelmingly larger. Why should he have any streak of vice at all? In man, a constant tussle is on between the intellect and emotions – the latter trying to drag him into the abyss of sensory pleasures and reduces him to the level of a beast, and the former attempting to bale him out of the baser instincts and elevate him to a Divine state. A vast majority of the people become slaves to sense organs, unable to resist their pulls, and remain at the rock-bottom throughout their lives. A few, however, succeed to a large extent in overpowering the debasing impulses. For them a small push is enough to catapult them to the pinnacle of spiritual wisdom, as illustrated by the life of Thiruneelakantar, one of the top-ranking Saivite saints.

An ardent devotee of lord Nataraja, Thiruneelakantar was so called because of his habit of uttering that hallowed name of Sri Siva even while he was engaged in daily chores. A potter by occupation, he did his bit of service to the Lord's votaries (Adiyars) by giving them mud-bowls free. In spite of his pious disposition, he had a weakness for women – this, despite the fact that his wife was charming and was of impeccable character. But he turned over a new leaf when his wife bade him, in the name of Lord Thiruneelakantar, not to touch her. The utterance of this Divine name, which he had held as pure and sacred and a source of sustenance, has an electrifying effect on him and at that very moment, made him resolve not to touch any woman, including his wife. He stuck to this vow till his last breath, a virtually superhuman task.

Sri Keeran in his discourse said God's names constituted the most efficacious means of extricating oneself from the morass of worldly pleasures. Uttered with implicit faith and devotion, they would bring about a spiritual transformation and enlightenment.

(Sri Keeran)

64. How justice prevailed in ancient India

Administrators in ancient India took extraordinary care to render justice to their citizens. Their endeavour was to see that real culprits did not escape the clutches of law and that even by mistake, no innocent person was made to suffer. The benefit of doubt was always given to the accused. No hasty conclusion was arrived at on the basis of suspicion or hearsay or on mere circumstantial evidence. In later years, reliance was placed on the version given by eye-witnesses, on documentary evidence or on customary right. There was no room for likes or dislikes or sentiments while awarding sentence. On certain occasions where the rulers felt helpless to arrive at a decision on account of the intricate legal points involved or when they thought that their view might be prejudical, resort to divine guidance was made by offering special (individual) prayers before their personal deity to provide them the necessary intellectual ability to pronounce the correct judgment. People had absolute confidence in the ruler's decision because they believed him to be God's representative.

Sri Keeran in his Thiruvilayadal Puranam discourse referred to such a predicament faced by a king when a poor man brought before him a strange case that his wife, who was resting underneath a huge banyan tree, was fatally pierced by an arrow. He suspected a hunter who happened to be nearby little realisng that the arrow had been dangling on the top of the tree for years and it fell down following a gale. The hunter swore in the name of God about his innocence even when tortured, to extract a confession. Ultimately, the king appealed to his deity and was given the clue to the riddle, indirectly. **(Sri Keeran)**

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65. Sine qua non of a spiritual aspirant

The majority of people call themselves believers in God. They visit temples, read religious texts, listen to discourses and observe religious practices and feel satisfied. However, it is for each one of them to judge how far his varied day-to-day activities conform to his faith, in the existence of the all-pervading and all knowing God. There is another class of people, rationalists, who dispute the existence of God. They are guided purely by "reason". As a matter of fact, "reason" and "faith" are like the two eyes of a person. Both are necessary for acquisition of true knowledge and wisdom. The spiritual aspirant should have his feet firm on the strong and secure foundation of faith.

The doubting and questioning Narendran, who later came to be known as Swami Vivekananda, was completely transformed by Sri Ramakrishna. The illustrious disciple came to regard his matter as a Divine incarnation. All rationalists cannot have the rare good fortune that Narendran had. Hence, the importance and relevance of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to the rationalists. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who experienced the presence of God, have a message for the believers too. The Bengali saint only re-discovered and re-interpreted the eternal truths handed down to mankind by the ancient seers and sages of India. The incidents in his life confirmed the spiritual experiences and exhortations of those venerable sages.

Swami Tapasyananda, in a discourse said that because of his proximity (Ramakrishna lived in the last century), and the fact that incidents in his life were duly recorded by those who observed him from close quarters, Sri Ramakrishna is specially relevant to modern times. He laid stress on the fundamental unity of all religions and his ideas accommodated the different schools of philosophy. **(Swami Tapasyananda)**

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66. Self-centered modern man has no inward peace

The modern man, under the impact of western civilization, is crazy about accumulating a variety of goods to make himself happy. Hence earning more and more money becomes an obsession with him. But the pity is, even after acquiring them, he continues to remain dissatisfied. He does not experience a sense of fulfillment, a feeling of joy. He possesses many things, but lacks the most important inward peace and quiet. His mind is always restless.

The habits, values and the life-style of the people have undergone a sea change in the last two or three generations. Our dwelling places are no longer happy homes filled with spiritual aroma and characterised by elders associating every activity with God and the young ones imbibing that bent of mind from childhood. In those bygone days, no one partook of anything before it was offered to the Lord. Every thing was God's "prasad". The entire family remained happy and contented. Those days, the people were not educated in the formal sense, but were knowledgeable; they knew what contributed to happiness and peace. Their lives were marked by simple living and high thinking and they shared their belongings with others. But, the educated modern man, highly self-centered, has not learnt how to be happy with himself and make others happy. Disappointed and dejected, he visits several places to get relief from stress and pain. All that he gets is only temporary titillation.

Sri Krishna Premi, in a discourse said one can get real peace and happiness only when one turned to God and sought the company of the pious and virtuous. If a person repeatedly listened to the narrations of the lives of exalted persons marked by simplicity and unselfishness, he would be irresistibly attracted to them.

(Sri Krishna Premi)

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67. Choose your God, but never hate others

One of the glorious aspects of Hinduism is the emphasis on the Doctrine of "Unity in Diversity". No one is compelled to worship a particular deity; each is free to choose a God. Having made his choice, he is asked to repose total confidence in His dispensation and be steadfast in his devotion to Him, whether in adversity or prosperity. It may be that in times of distress, the devotee may be tempted to see boons from elsewhere but this should be avoided. At the same time, the scriptures say God is one and there is no difference between, His various manifestations. How then is man reconcile the two apparently contradictory theories?

It is agreed that a devotee should be attached to his personal God like an ideal wife dependent on her husband alone. But, at the same time, being loyal and affectionate towards him does not mean that she should displease, or disobey, insult or be hostile towards his kith and kin. In fact her affectionate treatment of his relatives and service to them will gladden her husband. Likewise, a devotee should never denigrate Gods other than those Whom he worships. On the other hand, his personal God will feel pleased if he respect other deities. In the same manner, a person has to adhere strictly to the teachings of his spiritual guide but this does not imply that he should show animosity towards equally great religious leaders.

Thus one who has offered his surrender to a particular God should maintain a balance of judgment and never be antagonistic towards others. The Saivite saints, in their hymns, have not referred to Lord Vishnu and the Azhwars have not made any mention of Lord Siva in their verses but there is not even a tinge of mutual recrimination. This is the message spelt out through the Daksha episode in the Bhagavatham.

In his discourse Sri N. Neelbala Sarma referred to the several methods of devotion prescribed in the texts. Each one of

them is equally efficacious and a devotee adopting any one of them can experience the presence of God. His devotion should enable him to be taken gradually nearer God and the ultimate in the process is, to yearn for merger with Him.

(Sri N. Neelbala Sarma)

68. Moral treatise akin to the Bhagavad Gita

The thoughts of a person, the words which he utters and the deeds he performs should all be identical. But usually, he plans in his mind to carry out a particular scheme but when he specifies the same to others, he will invariably say the exactly opposite, either to deceive the other or deliberately misinform him. If by chance, a person speaks out as he thinks, he may not act in accordance with what has been indicated. His very deed may result in baffling situations. Only a hypocrite can act without any hesitation, flouting all canons of morality.

The symbol of virtue, Vidhura cautioned the blind king Dhritarashtra that the land he governed was not legitimately his and hence it should be handed over to his brother's sons, the Pandavas. Only those who have committed a wrong will not be able to sleep comfortably and Vidhura pleaded with the king to see that the legitimate share due to the Pandavas was returned, when, he would definitely enjoy peace of mind. But these words fell on deaf ears.

Sri Vishwapriya Thirtha Swami in his discourse on "Vidhura Needi", which is a treatise on the Law of Mortality, said this was akin to the "Bhagavad Gita" of the Lord. All aspects of human conduct have been analysed and Vidhura pointed out how a man should lead a life of purity. Vidhura said that the Pandava were least interested in getting the issue settled on the war field and even Bhima the most vehement among them, talked of the repercussions of bloody battle. But Draupadi, who could never reconcile to the ill-treatment meted out to her in a public assembly by the mischievous elements declared that even should her husbands decide to keep off the war path, she would settle the score by taking her sons help and wreak vengeance. Vidhura urged the king not to adopt a diabolic stance and cited the instance of the reeds on the banks bending fully and escaping the wrath of the floods while huge trees being uprooted because their soil holding the roots got eroded. Vidhura referred to the harm that a society suffered because of one's man's fault and gave the example of Ravana. He asked him not to be under the misapprehension and false hope that even if the Pandavas win the war, the righteous Yudhistirar would handover the reins of administration back to him.

(Sri Vishwapriya Thirtha Swami)

69. The Yoga connected to five virtues

From time immemorial, all the great, awakened and enlightened spiritual guides had given only one message – at all times and anywhere – to mankind, viz., of fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. The human being, the highest rung of all creations, is basically the same everywhere. All are born the same way, receive all the bounties of nature in a similar manner, have the same inner and outer construction and are controlled by the same power—God though called differently. They are all members of God's family.

India's ancient "mantram" –"Vasudaiva Kutumbakam" lays down the principle that entire world is one family. But it is common knowledge that despite long and loud preachings by various religious and social leaders professing the unity of man, the world today is torn by strife and tension. The root cause of the sorrow spectacle is that the gospel of the unity of man, however well-accepted in theory, is not put into practice. It remains at best as a mere slogan. It is also accepted that the purpose for which this human body has been provided, is to aim at the union of soul with the Cosmic Soul – God. This is achieved by Yoga, one of the various methods, which attempts to bring the two close. The Yogic system is one of the six schools of Indian philosophy systematised by sages and saints to set in order, the Indian thought concerning the Cosmos and relationship between man and God.

Sant Rajinder Singh, spiritual head of Sawan Kirpaul Kuhani Mission (Delhi) said here that God is one and the way back to Him is also one. The Surat Shabd (Sound) Yoga is an easier form when compared with other systems, all of which call for severe discipline. Every prospective initiate to the Shabd Yoga (which he imparts) should endeavour to adopt and cultivate five cardinal virtues —.Ahimsa (non-violence), Sathya (adherence to Truth), Brahmacharya (continence), universal love and selfless service to mankind. They should also practise the three purities – diet, livelihood and conduct. **(Sant Rajinder Singh).**

70. Guru makes overcoming problems easier

Many think that those who lead a spiritual life are selfish and are after comfort. This misconception can be removed by a comparison. Both a surgeon and a person who wants to kill, use knives in their respective professions. For the former it is a tool to save a patient while the latter, it is a weapon to deprive another of his life. Likewise, though the life-force is the same in all, spiritual aspirants utilise it to go through a selfless and disciplined existence to realise God and Truth whereas worldly-minded men will be keen on getting their desires satiated. God realisation can arise only out of elimination of selfishness. An enlightened person will perform all actions in a dedicated spirit which the pleasure-seeker will find it impossible to do.

Disinfectants may remove superficial germs but cannot destroy the more powerful ones, which cause fatal diseases. We can somehow eliminate the gross tendencies lurking in the mind but the subtle ones which get lodged in the subconscious mind require greater efforts to root out. This is possible with the help of a spiritual guide who will see the wicked tendencies are wiped out.

We find time to satisfy our various types of desires which involve us in great suffering and ultimately culminate in dissatisfaction. Even for minor sickness, we run to a medical man

but never seek advice or treatment of the supreme Doctor – God, for the chronic disease of repeated births, presuming that to go to Him is not necessary. We may spend money and time to resort to litigation in a court over a tiny piece of land but not keen on sparing a few minutes in the company of pious and holy men. Those who thirst for redemption from re-births will be few indeed.

Some may not like the idea of accepting another as a spiritual teacher, humbling themselves or undergoing discipline and if necessary, correction. But whatever a preceptor may ask them to do will only be with the intention of moulding or purifying their mind and inculcating discipline. Even as a blacksmith hammers a shapeless lump of iron on an anvil always keeping in mind the product he wants to make out of it, so too a religious guide will be planning as how to train his discipline. Even then, one may say that realisation can be had without the aid of a mediator. It will be possible, provided one has a pure mind from birth. In Kashmir apples flourish due to climate and soil but the same will not thrive on the plains. Even if their growth is made possible here, their quality and quantity will suffer said Mata Amritanandamayi in a speech. An aspirant can avoid pitfalls and can gain moral strength and power through the guidance of a guru. **(Mata Amritanandamayi).**

71. There is moral in every move of God

Some of the episodes in our religious literature seen to project, at times even highlight, baffling situations. Thinkers of modern era are not able to understand their significance and so decry them. For instance, while the Almighty visited the world on a number of occasions, to render justice to the pious from the tortures unleashed on them by wicked elements, how could He defy the tradition of residing with one spouses but sport with many women. Valid explanations had been given for such events.

At the time when this great sport took place, the Lord in human form, was a child. There was no amorous motive, as a few ridicule. The women who rushed to listen to Krishna's music which flowed through the flute and their behaviour, at that time displayed

their absolute dependence on Him. The same men who try to distort facts, will have no answer about the incident in which the same Divine child destroyed many evil forces as for instance, the serpent which was causing havoc to the people who resided in the nearby area (by emitting poisonous fumes).

The Lord takes incarnations at the request of devotees and during that period shows how men should conduct themselves. There is a moral in every move of the Almighty's and His concern to make people adhere to discipline. By listening to the exposition of the sacred texts, people's mind will be flushed out of the impurities.

No doubt, no man can escape sorrows and problems or be spared fro grief but when anyone unhesitatingly offers himself to God declaring his helplessness. He will surely protect him. There are steps to approach Him. Even if elaborate procedures are beyond his means, he can show his sincere devotion as did the unlettered cowherd population display by seeking His feet unconcerned about happenings around them. Sins will be obliterated and bliss can be experienced by hearing the Lord's traits.

What God expects of those who seek His protection is their sincerity and intensity of devotion. Pleas in the nature of mere business propositions like one saying that he would do worship should be immediately repaid duly will not be proper, said Sri. N. Babu Dikshitar in a discourse explaining how the unseen hands of God grant the wishes of His ardent devotees.

(Sri. N. Babu Dikshitar)

72. Significance of meditation

To be born as human being is a rare privilege as he is provided with the golden opportunity to sharpen his intellect and get inspired and enlighted. Man can make an endeavour to learn and achieve a goal. Otherwise, the purpose of his birth may be lost. The spiritual powers within should be awakened and directed toward obtaining the Divine Bliss. Life without an aim may be a waste as a diamond in the hands of a fisherman.

According to a parable, a fisherman seeing the stock of fish depleting in the place he usually angled, switched on to a new pond where he caught a bundle of stones. Not realising that they were pure gems, he allowed his son to play with them. The boy threw the "pebbles" one by one onto the lake till one day, his mother thought of selling one or two to procure in return, family rations. Only the purchaser could assess their worth. Sages had laid down the ways to spiritual benefits. They prescribed meditation as a means to seek Truth but in the process, they had cautioned man not to collect garbage. Meditation is an integrated process to acquire Knowledge of the Brahman (The absolute).

In a discourse, Swami Ishwarananda Giri of "Samvit Sadhanayana" (Mount Abu) explained how meditation was a "Sadhana" to seek God. It could not be sold or purchased but it implied an approach consisting of Bhakti, Shradda, Dhyana and yoga. Meditation connoted fixing one's mind on a specified object, may be anything. To whatever subject one might apply his mind, it would reveal itself. Meditation should be centralized on Truth and on transcendental values.

A foreigner who took to this step, sat erect and adopted the correct posture but concentrated on helicopters as he was working as an engineer in a factory manufacturing them. He said he got several ideas about their techniques. Hence meditation should not drag one to the mental plane. For this a Mantra like the Gayatri, has been recommended and meditating with its help after knowing its import, would fetch peace within and help one to be in touch with pure Divine consciousness. But meditation required intense practice and observance of rules, as "Shradda" could not be learnt through textbooks.

(Swami Ishwarananda Giri of "Samvit Sadhanayana")

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73. Devotion knows no caste or creed

The term "devotion" has been amply defined in the spiritual classics like the Bhagavatam and the Narada Bhakti Sutras with illustrations. The Pandava Gita explains it in simple words, saying that God resides in our hearts and He is all auspicious. The only lacuna is that our minds are not mature enough to have His vision. But those who are able to experience His manifestation within will feel highly blissful and enjoy the ecstasy.

Devotion can also be described as the spiritual power that can keep away the trauma, the bad complexes and the evil in us. But devotion should not be conventional or ostentatious nor should it be stagnant. It is not the mere external exuberance that matters. Many may be found to shed tears out of devotional fervour but the same attitude should be shown in wiping out the distress of others. What then is the test of true devotion. The answer has been provided by Lord Krishna Himself. Devotion knows no caste or class or creed. A true devotee should carry the burden with a smile and there should be a "flow" in his life.

"I am the same to all beings; with Me, there is none disfavoured : but those who worship me with devotion are in Me and I am in them. You must find refuge in Me" the Lord had declared openly. Swami Ranganadanda, in a discourse referred to the Almighty's statement about the need to develop discriminative knowledge and deep devotion, the essence of which is "All beings are in Me". A staunch devotee will be contented and free from exultation or resentment. Three emotions should be overcome to reach God; attachment, fear and anger. A sincere devotee neither rejoices nor grieves, is immune to both good and evil and respects every other creation of God. He will remain silent, unmoved by praise or blame. Bhakti is infinite love of God, and praying ceaselessly within and all devotional exercises should help to "bring God before us in our life". Wherever we are, God will come to us if we display total dedication and He will reciprocate our sentiments. **(Swami Ranganadanda)**

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74. Some Divine commands of conduct

Saints, whom God specially deputes, assume the chief responsibility to awaken the dormant spiritual power in men so that they can enjoy peace and bliss. The Godmen will make lay persons realise the purpose for which they have taken birth and guide them to adopt steps to go forward in the path of liberation. Another task entrusted to them is to teach people that the Soul, which resides within the body and the body itself which is perishable, are not identical. The bonds of caste, creed, sex and language relate only to the physical body whereas the Soul (Atma) is free from all these factors. It is with the constant blessings of the Almighty that we continue to live. Every moment, He is protecting us.

Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Ahmedabad) in a discourse on the universal moral and spiritual guidelines preached by Lord Swaminarayan said, even the religious-minded people of modern times have no time to search for the Truth though they possess the spiritual urge. Some of them are not competent to interpret it properly as they have not gone through the moral codes.

The Lord's epistle of precepts refines men's conduct, begets virtues and develops integrity. Some of the commands in the text of Lord are he who acts thoughtlessly or with a bad intention, invites misery; do not give up the path of righteousness out of greed or selfishness; do not utter words which may hurt others; never keep the company of those, who, under the pretext of devotion and preceptorship, indulge in hypocrisy and immortal activities; do the vocation befitting your station in life; avoid dealing with the wicked, those who deceive and the fraudulent, always see the good in others and not their faults; respect saints and study scriptural texts with reverence; to undo sins committed, by mistake, adopt expiatory measures as per the scriptural directives. Supplement devotion with righteous conduct and never give up faith in the Lord out of fear of slander by the unscrupulous and the ignorant. Being the "Moral Governor". God rewards or punishes a person according to his pious or wicked deeds.

(Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

75. Devotion will always lead to Supreme bliss

Some instances where even ardent devotees suffer, contrary to the belief that God never allows those devoted to Him to grieve, make people wonder why He should indulge in such methods. Why should He give agony to his sincere devotees. Is He a mere task-master? Has He no mercy? If that be His attitude, why should He be adored as the Ocean of compassion? Why should a person seek refuge in Him if He can remain happy amidst worldly pleasures?

These thoughts may arise in some who wanting to become religious, see men in misery. These doubts have indeed been answered. The main reply is worldly activities will end one day and God has reason to appear to be unconcerned when men defy His commands.

Man, from time immemorial, has been behaving as if he is independent and that he needs no help from anyone. He believes he can achieve what he wants by using the power within him and his wisdom. He tries to overcome hurdles by using his intelligence. Only when he feels there is no way out to solve his problems that he seeks assistance. Since no human being can come to his rescue, he remembers the possibility of seeking the Divine hand.

Only when a man is placed in distress, can he be made aware of the Unseen, unlimited power of God. But why should the devotees be immersed in grief when they think of God at all times and know that He alone can solve their problems. Though the treatment afforded to them appears to be harsh, it helps them to gain greater confidence and acquire greater moral courage. Their entire attention will be on God. They will then experience "supreme bliss". The process is like vaccination which is painful and may also cause fever; but it gives relief ultimately making one immune to scourge said Sri N. Lakshminarasimhan in a discourse.

Without properly knowing the significance of simple tests given by God, men complain of the master plans. The episode relating to the removal of clothes by Krishna, if properly understood will reveal His purpose in doing so. He was young but He wanted the women to learn a lesson. He was moved when they meekly surrendered themselves to Him. Such a step will remove the bondage of a human being who accepts His supremacy.

(Sri N. Lakshminarasimhan)

76. Efficacy of Sri Narayana Kavacham

Mantras-special chants in which are embedded the secrets of God's real form- are an effective medium of worship. Recited with sincerity and devotion, they help us to achieve perfect communion with the Creator. They are also potent antidotes to nullify the evil influences and deadly effects of black magic and other occult faculties. Mantras enable us to develop supernatural powers, confer on us mental quietude and give us the strength to withstand the impact of inimical forces.

In his discourse, Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar said when the demons gained enormous might by learning special mantras through their religious head Sukracharya, Indra and other Devas sought the assistance of a scholar Viswarupa, and mastered equally forceful chants and got back the status which they had earlier lost. The "Narayana Kavacham", which the purohit taught them contain three specific mantras in praise of God. Also termed the "vaishnavi Vidhya", it was an armour providing eternal protection against attack from any quarter. Its repetition redeemed one from all ills and sins.

The detailed account of the efficacy of the Narayana Kavacham also gave a description of the minimum rites one was expected to perform daily, as well as gist of the ten incarnations of God. Recitation of the verses which contained the Avataras would keep off all malefic forces. For instance, meditation on Sri Narasimha would help one to face any danger and Sri Rama, (while on tour) would enable one to get general protection.

(Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar)

77. Temple worship

One of our duties as human beings is to avail ourselves of every opportunity to do good to others. The poor can serve others by their physical labour and the rich by their wealth. Some can use their influence to better the condition of others. That way, we can keep alive in our hearts the sense of social service.

It is the poor that joined together in ancient times and built the grand temples and towers which we find today in every town and village of South India. The economy of those days was different from what it is now. People's wants were few and the surplus produce of the land was utilized to hire labour to build these great structure of public utility and spiritual inspiration.

In the present day, social service is viewed in a different manner. Schools and hospitals are built and banks organised on a community basis with the object of eradicating ignorance, diseases and poverty. But it is evident that these forms of social service have not been an unmixed blessing. Education has not eradicated falsehood and corruption. On the other hand, unsophisticated tribal people, whom modern education has not reached, are found to be more honest than the socalled educated people. Confidence of obtaining cure in hospitals has made people lead reckless lives. All the banks that have come into existence have not succeeded in eradicating poverty among the masses.

In our modern mode of life, we have multiplied our wants. This will lead only to perpetual discontent. A life of extreme simplicity alone can bring contentment and happiness to the people. In this country, there are, what may be called, community temples. For instance at Avadayarkoil, it is the custom to offer large quantities of cooked rice to the presiding deity and the same made available to all at a nominal cost. In many temples the sense of community life is fostered by devoting special days and occasions for it. Consecrated food is made available through them to all those in need.

Gratitude for help received is a cardinal virtue. The taxes you pay are your expression of gratitude for the services rendered by the agencies concerned. There are super-human agencies; which confer benefits on us. We must express our gratitude to those agencies in the manner prescribed in the Vedas. This expression of gratitude is known as Yagna. Though schools, hospitals and banks and such other social service organizations may be necessary in the context of our present times, these institutions cannot serve their respective purposes in the absence of devotion. The one cure for all human ills is the power to endure them with faith in God's grace. Bhakti alone can give that power of endurance. Temples are the agencies for the cultivation of Bhakti. Hence the obligation to build temples in every place.

What is the significance of making offerings to the idols installed in temples? This is done as an expression of gratitude to the Power that created all things. Man by himself cannot create even a blade of grass. We will be guilty of gross ingratitude if we do not offer first to God, what we eat or wear. Only the best and the choicest should be offered to God. It is not every one that can do pooja at home and make these offerings to God. It is here temples come into picture. Offerings are made in the temples on behalf of the entire community.

It is not even necessary that every one should worship inside the temples every day. Gopura Darsanam will itself elevate our minds and make us remember the source from which we drive all the earthy benefits. At the same time, it is necessary for the community to see that worship at the temples is conducted properly. We should make it a point to see the temple tower every day and thereby concentrate a while on God. At least once a week we should go round the temple, reciting naamaas (God's names) and doing bhajan. If we do so, we will derive real and lasting benefit. **(Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi)**

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78. Efficacy of Vedic incantations

The efficacy of Vedic incantations, recited strictly according to tradition, can be proved scientifically. One of the religious functions for an enceinte woman suggests the rendering of special Mantras by two proficient players on two veenas. The sound waves are found to have a direct bearing on the growth of the child, which will be found exceptionally talented. The Mantras retain their power for all time. From womb to tomb of a person, about 40 religious rites have been prescribed (Samskaras) for the prosperity, happiness and sound health of a human being. Marriage is never treated as a mere biological necessity: on the other hand, it is a sacred contract intended to maintain the continuity of a family. The Mantras recited during the functions are intended to ensure a sound progeny. A political treatise, Sukra Needhi, gives an instance where a dull person was turned intelligent by making him repeat some of the religious functions, as it was guessed that their performance on earlier occasions while he was young had become infructuous as they had been carried out imperfectly.

In a discourse, Sri S. Panchapakesa Sastrigal referred to the Pumsavana-Seemantham function that had to be organized during the fourth month of a woman's pregnancy, though traditionally it was being conducted at a much later period. The Mantras chanted would result in the proper development of the child without deformities. The basic requirement to test the potency of the Mantras was faith and belief in our Sastras.

(Sri S. Panchapakesa Sastrigal)

79. The power of mantras is enormous.

A mystical energy encased in a sound structure and containing within its vibrations a certain power is termed the "mantra". Upon concentration and repetition of a prescribed mantra, its energy is elicited and takes form. Each mantra is constructed from a combination of sounds which have a definite and predictable effect on the human psyche and body. An obvious example is the difference between classical and rock music; the

former tends to be relaxing while the other is inclined to excite the senses. On a more subtle level, mantras are applied for specific purposes.

There are different types of mantras but more common is the one in which a specific form with attributes is visualized, along with the repetition of the sound. A family man, for instance, whose ideal is to be a loving and responsible husband might meditate on the name of Rama. Visualisation of deities is only an aid to focus the mind. Repeating the mantras, which are the names of deities, internalises the power of vibrations contained in them. As Divine power manifests itself in sound, the mantra itself is the subtle body of the deity. By chanting the syllables with accuracy and devotion, the form of the mantra's presiding deity will be invoked.

In a discourse Swami Vishnu Devananda said using sound vibrations (japa) for meditation is a method of channelling one's consciousness from the lowest to the highest level of pure thought. Uttered verbally or mentally, a mantra lifts one into the telepathic stage and beyond to the transcendental. The power of sound is enormous and tremendous. In addition to image and form, it can generate ideas, emotions and experiences. Chanting removes the impurities in the mind. Concentration on the meaning of the mantra and on the attributes of a particular deity will fetch God-realisation quickly. In the state of meditation, the flow of inner thought wave is intensified. The deeper the meditation, the greater the effect.

(Swami Vishnu Devananda)

80. Vidhura Needhi

Even when one is confronted with the worst trials and tribulations, he should not lose his balance. Patience is a virtue and the quality of endurance (kshama) is the hallmark of nobility. This is evidenced by Dharmaputra's absolute calmness and unperturbed outlook.

Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar expounding the Mahabharata dealt with the ennobling advice given by Vidhura, a great counselor and an unparalleled statesman , to the blind king, Dhitharashtra, while explaining the impending consequences

arising out of the enmity between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Vidhura Needhi as it amy be termed, brought out several valuable doctrines. For instance, Vidhura says that some are always intent on creating rift and conflict, reveling in sowing seeds of dissension of wounding others' sentiments. Friendship with such men should be shunned. Those endowed with wealth should help their kith and kin in want. They should however decide either to refuse to part with their one or render the aid, knowing full well that it will not be returned. There is no point in regretting or lamenting over the loss later.

Dharma Sastras, in which several codes are laid are no doubt difficult to follow, but it will be wrong to discard them because of the hardship involved in putting them into practice. Words of wisdom dinned into the ears of those who refuse to listen and assimilate them, are like precious things lost in the ocean, which are irrecoverable. Dharma Sastras should be taught step by step. Since youth is the period when one is pulled on all sides by temptations, the restrictions on personal conduct are rigid. If there is no control over the Senses (Indriyas), the result will be unmitigated suffering. Lust of any kind, should be controlled with grim determination through strict self-discipline. Even Devas are no exception and he instanced Indra's overtures to Ahalya. Vidhura tells the king that Duryodhana's acts against the Pandavas were unpardonable. Wealth accumulated by means other than fair, is bad. If the ill-gotten money is to be distributed with an eye on obtaining future benefits, it will be of no avail. The self-possessed, like Dharmaputra, should remain unruffled under all conditions, with his thoughts fixed on Go **(Sri Karpangadu Venkatachariar)**

81. Sacrifice, trait of noble life

Man's existence should be guided by certain principles. Each one of us must have an aim in life which ought to be fulfilled. Invariably, people on their onward journey regret (when they leave this world) that they had not achieved anything and that they travelled all along without a purpose. Whether successful or not, (during their stay here), they ought to have conducted themselves with others in utter humility.

Sacred texts plead with people to teat those in a lower strata, with kindness and not to injure their sentiments. Spiritual knowledge acquired should reveal to them not to commit the mistake of identifying the body with the soul. The lives of several great men remind us of the sacrifice they had done, while some had adopted even deceitful methods to gain power.

Sri Kripanandavariar in a discourse cited the story of Karna who donated all that he had in response to demands for donation. A king on his rounds saw a creeper on the roadside seeking a support to grow and he left his chariot to enable it to climb on it, walking back to his castle. But the episode of another ruler Kumanan was different. When his brother wanted to become the king, he handed over the reins of administration to him without any hesitation. Generous as he was while occupying the throne, even when he was residing in a forest all alone without power, he obtained the rare gem that a cobra possessed and gave it to a poor poet who wanted help. The latter informed the ruler about his brother's rare gesture. Growing jealous of Kumanan's popularity, the ruler announced the gift of a kingdom for one who obtained his head. Even for this, Kumanan agreed and when his severed head was presented before him, the younger brother felt ashamed and regretted his own avarice and for the injustice meted out to the elder brother.

On the other hand, contrary to this inhuman behaviour, the Ramayana highlights how Bharata refused to accept the kingdom that was thrust on him because he felt that it legitimately belonged to his brother Rama. He never expected his mother to have been so unkind as to deprive Rama of His emperorship. Till Rama returned from exile, he administered the country only as the former's regent. Power did not corrupt him as in the case of Kumanan's brother. **(Sri Kripanandavariar)**

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82. Cultured mind only can grasp truth

Scriptures emphasise that human birth is rare to get and it is only after several births in the lower order of creation that one evolves to the human stage. This fact must constantly remind us to make the best use of this opportunity given to us to realise the goal of all human endeavour – to realise our spiritual nature which will liberate us from rebirths.

All actions we perform in our daily life must be oriented to this goal and for this it is essential to understand how we must lead our lives. What distinguishes human life from animal life is the pursuit of value and righteous conduct, guided by the gift discrimination we are endowed with, which animals do not have. Otherwise if we allow our instincts to dictate our lives we will not be different from animals.

In his address Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swami said, Hindu religion emphasised that man could rise to the level of the Divine. Before we can aspire to realise the Divinity in us we must atleast learn to live like human beings. It has become imperative to emphasise this point because modern life has become so divorced from values.

Man is today after ephemeral sensual pleasures which give momentary gratification. To wean the Senses away from material objects it is necessary to have control over the mind. For this we have to find ways to develop one-pointedness of mind. Fine arts like painting and music help in achieving mental concentration. Lofty and noble sentiments are the outward expression of a highly developed mind which is known by the term “culture”.

We have had a long cultural tradition within the fold of Hinduism which has expressed the spiritual ideal through various arts which have flourished since the Vedic times. Instead of debasing the natural instincts of man, pursuit of fine arts seeks to enrich the mind. Culture thus must actualise the inner spiritual potential of man and not push him to the level of a beast.

It is the pure mind that has become one pointed which can grasp abstract ideas necessary for understanding subtle philosophical truth. So, in our cultural tradition our pursuits are all wedded to the highest ideal of spiritual perfection and this fact should make us pursue and take pride in our culture.

Dharma or righteous conduct which is the basis of our culture and religion must express itself in the life of man. It is not something to be pursued divorced from our daily life. If we abide by Dharma it would protect us said, Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi Swami in his address. When we adopt Dharma in our personal lives, it leads to the well-being of the society and prosperity of the entire world. **(Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swami)**

83. Devotees' duty to preserve culture

Every Indian, even at birth, retains in him the spark of Divinity which gradually intensifies and keeps him soaked in devotion. Invariably all are deeply attached to God, knowing Him to be all-powerful and that only through Divine mercy, the worldly activities are sustained. However in the case of a few, who display animosity towards the Almighty and decry religious procedures, branding them as the fictitious imagination of some who have prescribed them as the panacea for ills of the humanity. But the greatest wonder is that despite this campaign of calumny and denigration of God, the number of temples, His abodes, is on the increase. Devotion runs in the veins but some, due to their avarice and their anxiety to achieve fame and with the idea that they should “somehow” become powerful, adopt anti-God stance.

The Sringeri Sankaracharya, - Sri Bharathi Thirtha said, all activities in the world take place only according to God’s will. If Divine dispensation is the basis for what takes place, why should then a person commit mistakes and suffer? Will it not be proper that God should make people carry out only good deeds? Bad deeds follow crimes and people who indulge in them cannot go unpunished. Why they turn bad depends on the Law of “Karma” and in successive births, they commit more errors. If people want to avoid the same, they should resort to worship and prayers, which

will help them to generate Devotion within. They should seek the guidance of a spiritual master. Youngsters should treat their parents with utmost reverence. Modern youth sometimes show scant courtesy and even ridicule their adherence to tradition. To say that parents are ignorant is perhaps the greatest misfortune. The country's hoary culture and heritage should be preserved. They have been handed over to us by sages and saints after so many trials, for our good and for our prosperity. If someone says that he continues to worship in his house, an idol that has been preserved over generations, we must be proud of him. Whatever may be the nature of our profession and whatever may be our individual status, two factors – Righteousness and Devotion, bind us together. Adi Sankara prescribed the correct way of life based on "Dharma and Bhakthi" and people should uphold the same.

(Sri Bharathi Thirtha)

84. Justice should be upheld at all costs

God is the primordial cause for all that happens in the world. He is the motivating force for any human activity. To get educated, to secure wisdom and to obtain the where-withal for life's sustenance, man depends at every stage on Him. This is plainly stated by the Tamil Saint, Thiruvalluvar in the very first couplet in his monumental treatise on ethics. Thirukkural, which explains how we should conduct ourselves. In the other couplets, he lays extraordinary stress on good conduct and a blemishless character. The Law of Virtrue advises men to totally eschew anger, pointing out how a chain of reactions will take place when a man is seized with this bad trait.

This moral-preacher Avvaiyar has also pointed out the various methods to uphold righteousness, to develop character and maintain discipline. When desire turns into avarice, and when a person is denied possession of what he needs, dejection sets in and tension mounts within him. When calm is restored, the person who lost his temper regrets for his bad behavoiur. When a mistake is committed, to escape from the consequences he seeks legal protection. Most of the dispute that go to law courts today are due to greed or personal animosity. In days of yore, there were books containing tales which highlighted moral values.

Sri Jayendra Saraswathi narrated an episode in which a housewife, taking pity on a hungry man, offered him a glass of milk. Instead of drinking it straightway, he went to a nearby tank to wash his hands and face, keeping the tumbler underneath a tree. Right above was a falcon clawing a snake. A drop of poison from the reptile accidentally fell into the receptacle containing the milk, though no one noticed it. The hungry man drank it and collapsed and the housewife thought that she was responsible for his death and started crying. Ultimately, when sages visualised and what had happened, the air of mystery was cleared and no one was declared a sinner. Destiny played its role. Bhartruhari has rendered a verse in which, to emphasise how the scale of justice should be held even and how lawyers should argue their clients' cases based on sacred facts. He has declared that under no circumstances should equity and honesty become a casuality. After God, the courts should uphold truth, at all costs. **(Sri Jayendra Saraswathi)**

85. Hinduism is universal in character

The edifice of Hinduism has been founded, erected and fostered by sages, saints and illustrious spiritual guides. Hence the customs, usages and traditions which are being continued have eternal validity and they can be scientifically explained. The scriptures are not myths as some say.

Every act has a deep significance. Unfortunately, the cultural history of Hindus has been distorted by some 'vested' interests who have made a 'criminal' approach towards this Faith. This ancient religion is universal in character and desires that the entire humanity should be one. To prove this, it can be pointed out how Hinduism has never believed in conquering other countries or forcing members of other faiths to join its fold. A Hindu can take legitimate pride in his cultural and religious background and in preserving its heritage.

Some people brand Hindus as fanatics not aware of the glorious traditions they have imbibed. Facts have been twisted in respect of various rites and rituals. It is misinterpreted that in the sacrifices conducted, animals were killed. This is far from truth.

The Sanskrit lexicons and dictionaries sometimes give various meanings for the same word. Hence proper interpretation with reference to the particular context is necessary. Thus instead of criticising Lord Rama as having partaken meat, it can be seen that He consumed the root of tuber which, after due processing appeared like flesh.

Swami sathyananda Saraswathi (Ramadasa Ashram) in a lecture referred to the wisdom of the ancient in that they had possessed light types of aeroplanes, including the familiar Pushpaka Vimana. Different varieties of metal were used in their manufacture. The Vedic Mathematics were being adopted to solve problems. But modern students were being taught distorted versions. Even Swami Vivekananda as a boy was told that their fathers were fools, grandfathers lunatics and Hindu scriptures were false. On the other hand, the discussion between Rama and Vasishta brings out valuable information on human behaviour. Scripture spell out the significance of circumambulation (clockwise) in temples and why the bride always sits on the left side. The fact that Rama befriended the hunterchieftain Guha and an aged woman Sabari would show that there was no discrimination and Hindu Religion is not sectarian. **(Swami sathyananda Saraswathi)**

86. The five pillars of Islam

A Muslim is one who believes in God and strives for total re-organisation of his life according to His revealed guidance and the sayings of Prophet Mohammad. He should work for building human society on the same basis. The Arabic word “Islam” means, peace, submission and obedience. The religion of Islam is complete acceptance of the teachings of God as revealed to the Prophet. Islam has been built on five pillars, unity of Allah, the proper name for God, and messnegership of Mahammad, conducting prayer for five times, fasting during the month of Ramzan; payment of “poor tax” performance of pilgrimage (Haj). The fourth and fifth are enjoined on those who can afford and are fit. These apart, a Muslim believes in six articles of faith: Allah, angels, Revealed Books, His messengers, doomsday and pre-destination – whatever is destined is from Allah who is the Creator.

He is one and only one. He has no form or shape. He is in existence forever and shall remain forever. He is not born to anyone. He has all the attributes like knowledge, power, hearing, seeing and speaking.

The Divine books have been given to mankind from time to time through Prophets. Four of them are major books while a good number are booklets. The final revealed book is the Holy Quran, gifted to Prophet Mohammad. It is a complete code of life, relevant for all times and climes. Allah chose His messengers to guide humanity. On the occasion of Muharram, Dr. U. Mohammad said in a lecture, the first among them was Adaru and the last Prophet Mohammad in between, about 1,24,000 of them had appeared. Mohammad was not only an ideal prophet but was a model, the like of whom the world had not seen nor will see. A philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, restorator of national dogmas and of cult without images and founder of one spiritual empire, and that is Prophet Mohammad. God has commanded (in Quran) “Hold on to what the Prophet has brought and discard guidelines for a purposeful life, reminding a person of his duties and obligations. In Islam, man’s life is wholesome and integrated.
(Dr. U. Mohammad)

87. Prophet Mohammad, apostle of peace

Prophet Mohammad, the Apostle of Peace, was born in Mecca in 571 AD. He heralded the last and the greatest revolution in the religious consciousness of mankind. He raised them to a dignity that was neither dreamt nor imagined earlier. It was made mandatory to seek a woman’s consent for marriage and inheritance rights were also given to her. The recognition and provision of conjugal parting and the right to seek divorce was an equally revolutionary legislation. Mohammad, though precept and practice, created a social order where the slaves could rub shoulders with their masters, distinctions of race and colour were completely abolished and “righteousness” was made the sole criterion of greatness. Obligation towards neighbours irrespective of any religious or social bias were stressed to such an extent that some feared it would lead to inheritance rights. The Apostle made

it obligatory for every Muslim boy and girl to be educated and that one should seek knowledge even if one were to go China.

Mohammad lived a life of various facets as varied as a shepherd, a trader, a hermit, an arbiter of disputes, a truce maker, a leader of men, a commander; but foremost a prophet, a teacher of mankind and a servant of God. As a human being Mohammad remains the perfect example and model of virtues personified. The Quran is the final message of God testifying to the coming of earlier prophets and revealed books. It emphasises the miracle of creation and the mysteries of nature, exhorting readers to understand the Divine will in mundane and apocalyptic events of human history. The concepts of equality and fraternity spelt out in the Quran and sincerely practised by Prophet's followers, paved the way for reform movements all over the world. The spirit of critical enquiry regarding the phenomenal world is consistently exhorted by the Quran. Earlier caliphs encouraged high intellectual pursuits in almost all disciplines of thought.

Islam, the last of the revealed religions, enjoins upon its followers total acceptance of and complete faith in the unity of God, Mohammad's prophethood and the life hereafter, laying great emphasis on good conduct, accountability and unity of mankind. The four cardinal obligations of a Muslim are: prayer five times a day, fasting in the month of Ramadan, charity-due, at the rate of 2.5 per cent from annual savings and pilgrimage to Mecca once in a life time for those who can afford it. Islam remains the life-force and lodestone of billions of men and women spread over the entire globe. Besides the revealed book and personal example, / mohammad has left behind thousands of companions and followers. **(Naqi Husain Jafri)**

88. Time to remember message of the Cross

This time of the year, Christians around the world observe one of the most significant events in the history of the world – the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Good Friday projects a striking picture of both physical and spiritual anguish Jesus experienced for the redemption of mankind. The life of

Jesus on earth was a little less than 2,000 years ago. The Gospels do not tell us much about His life until He was about 30 years old. Jesus performed many miracles.

As a preacher, Jesus followed the Jewish Doctrine of the Old Testament but carried the message of love and humility much farther, making them apply to all men and not only to the Jews.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was involved in conflict with the religious authorities, mainly because of His scathing criticism of their manmade traditions which diverted men from the real purpose of God's law. That He spoke the truth was intolerable to all forms of authority, especially ecclesiastical. The High Priest and the elders conspired to kill Him.

There was the farce of the judicial intended to give His execution a show of legality. He was put through a trial which appears to have broken the appropriate legal rules. When the witnesses failed to produce sufficient evidence of condemn Jesus, He was forced to make what His judges regarded as the blasphemous statement that He was the Messiah. The High priest and the elders were not entitled to impose the death sentence. So they handed Him over to the Roman Governor, as a political rebel against Rome. Although the Governor was privately convinced of Jesus' innocence, he allowed Him to be put to death by the Roman punishment of crucifixon.

Jesus accepted it though He knew what was involved in scourging and execution at the hands of the Romans. The Romans used a flagellum, a whip of leather thongs, to which small pieces of metal or bone were tied. People sometimes died under the scouge. The back of Jesus was laid open by the Roman scourge. His head was covered with a crown of thorns. His hands were nailed to the cross.

When Jesus went willingly to death, He was offering His life for mankind. His was the sacrifice that God had appointed

and ordained to be the one and only sacrifices for sin. The Cross, as the supreme symbol of suffering, reveals two basic facts: the depth of man's depravity and the immensity of God's love.

(A.Yeshuratnam)

89. Salvation through suffering

On Good Friday, Christians the world over meditate on a suffering God. This is a stumbling block to many for they cannot conceive of a God who like human beings can suffer. By definition, God is impersonal and transcendent and, therefore, beyond the pale of human emotions and categories. They believe that a suffering God is too anthropomorphic to do justice to the divinity of God. Hence, many do not even approve of incarnations. Is it not ridiculous to subject God to all the infirmities that humanity is heir to? Will it not be preposterous to let God participate in a life which many look upon as nothing if not a bagful of misery and suffering and therefore better to be rid of. Our ideal world is always one where there is no suffering or pain!

But a closer scrutiny would show us that a world devoid of suffering cannot indeed be the best of all possible worlds. For it is given to mankind to distinguish the genuine from the fake, the true from the false, the original from the duplicate, the real from the bogus, only through the test of suffering. A mother's love is glorified not because she is the source of all good things, but mainly because it's a mother who is prepared to undergo all kinds of sufferings and pain for the welfare of her child. Suffering also is the test of true friendship. How else would say anyone know who his true friends are, except through the test of sufferings?

No wonder when God wanted to reveal His amazing love for mankind He chose the way of suffering. This is no simplistic anthropomorphic understanding of God, for if it was left to the imagination of a human intellect, most probably the outcome would have been a superhuman image of God and not an image of a suffering servant as that would be more in tune with the human concept of God.

Lord Jesus goes the whole hog, as it were, taking upon himself the Karma of the world and atones for it by subjecting himself to suffering and pain; leading to death, reward of sin. Where God's justice and love meet, we see the cross. A theologian calls it the "Costly Grace of God". Christianity does not offer its followers salvation from suffering, but salvation through suffering. This is its paradox and its glory. For God Himself, through His sufferings bequeathed blessings and salvation to all mankind. The devout, therefore, do not look upon suffering as something to be loathed but a means of sharing God's grace and blessings.

(Rev. .V. Theodore)

90. Significance of Baisakhi

Baisakhi, the Punjabi new year day, corresponds to the Tamil new year day. It has always been celebrated with gusto and gaiety. On this day in 1699, Guru Nanak's nine successors did something that was later to change the course of Indian history.

A contemporary of Aurangazeb, Guru Gobind Singh (1866-1708) clashed with the emperor and their differences were never resolved. The days of sagacious and liberal policy of religious tolerance by Akbar came to an end. During the reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan the State policy gradually came under the sway of the clergy.

Those who did not profess or readily adopt the state religion were subjected to discrimination and oppressive laws. Special taxes were imposed, their educational institutions were ordered to be closed and their places of worship demolished. The fundamental human right of freedom to worship was denied and by the early 1670s, the atmosphere had become stifling. Guru Teg Bahadur, Nanak the ninth, decided to take up the people's cause. Aurangazeb, instead of reasoning and changing his policy, had him publicly executed in 1675 (Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Delhi's Chandni Chowk marks the hallowed spot). Guru Gobind Singh who was then only nine years old resolved to carry on the struggle. In his autobiography he says he was born to uphold righteousness and to destroy the wicked – a task which required the dual role of a saint and soldier. The organization through which he was to

accomplish this work must therefore comprise people possessing the highest degree of morality (as saints) and fearlessness of death (as soldiers). The problem was where and how to find such selfless, dedicated people.

Came the Baisakhi of 1699! People in large numbers were invited to assemble at Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh made a dramatic appearance with a sword in hand. To everyone's amazement, instead of the expected religious discourse, he made a simple demand. Was there anyone willing to lay down his life for the sake of Dharma? The meeting was stunned into silence. Heads bent low. But then rose a person, Bhai Daya Ram, a Khatri of Lahore, who offered himself in the cause. The Guru led him to a nearby tent and soon was back on the stage with a blood-dripping sword to make another call. Now the audience had no doubt what the Guru meant to do with the volunteers. Some even started slipping away. Next, a person by the name of Bhai Dharm Chand, a Jat and the Guru again returned to the stage. He made three more calls which were responded to by Bhai Mukham Chand, a washerman of Dwaraka; Bhai Sahib Chand, a barber of Bidar and Bhai Himmat Rai, a water carrier of Puri.

A little later, Guru Gobind Singh brought froth all the five volunteers alive, dressed in martial attire and fully armed. He called them Panj Pyare (the five beloved). He gave them the baptism of steel and changed their names to end in Singh (lion). Daya Ram became Daya Singh and Dharm Chand became Dharm Singh and so on. These five constituted the nucleus of the great Khalsa organisation which Guru Gobind Singh created for the purpose of establishing righteousness and ending oppression. About 20,000 people followed the example and accepted the baptism of steel that day and later more people joined the new order.

It was with this Khalsa that Guru Gobind Singh challenged the oppression of the mighty Moghuls. It is a historical fact that time and again the handful of Khalsa fighters got the better of Moghul forces. After Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708, the Khalsa carried on the struggle. The 18th century was marked by most devastating raid of Nadir Shah and the repeated raids of

Ahmed Shah Abdali. The Khalsa would accost the raiders while they passed through the Punjab. They would relieve them of much of their loot and have the maximum number of women captive released.

91. Everyone equal in God's creation

"All are noble in God's eye. None is lowly. All vessels are fashioned by the same maker; the same light illumines the three worlds. Real enlightenment comes through God's grace and blessings, which are ineffaceable. Contentment, the true teacher is the tree, its flower is righteousness, its fruit illumination, which is ever fresh; it ripens through good actions and meditation; its eating brings joy. Do not forget the Almighty; leave the rest to His will'. These were the appeals of one of the greatest bards of God, though he described himself as an idle minstrel chanting, night and day, His praise. That was Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, whose Jayanthi is being celebrated today.

Contrary to the geberality of holymen and religious preachers of his time (15th century), Guru Nanak was not an advocate of total renunciation from the concern of the material world. He commended the life of a householder, calling upon all men to combat the evils and injustices under which humanity was groaning. He had the clear vision of a just society as the goal of a man. He saw worldly pomp, wealth and glory as insubstantial. Rather than rituals, he suggested prayer, meditation and devotion. Pursued with sincerity, these lead to the uplifting of the soul which is the essence of religious experience.

An element of supernatural was witnessed in his life, right from the time of his birth in the year 1469 Ad. His teachers were perplexed by the sudden flashes of intuitive power and knowledge displayed by him. Guru Nanak underwent enlightenment on the banks of river Bein.

The Guru's religious emphasis was basically ethical. The essence of his teaching is reflected in the prayer of Sikhs, offered twice daily: "By grace of Nanak, may the spirit ascend to ever

greater heights; may general weal descend on all creations by Divine grace". The accent is on the welfare of all spheres of human life, including, the family, the general community and the state.

Sri Surjit Singh Sahney in a lecture referred to the moral law the Guru envisaged in which those who lived away from God and in indulgence should one day fall under the weight of their own evil. In one of his exhortations, he had said, "Death of heroic men is blessed should they lay down their lives to approved causes". The Divine persons, except God the highest, are to be worshipped. The Guru ensured that community singing (kirtan) became a regular feature of the daily congregation in the Gurdwaras (Sikh temple). In one of the hymns, Nanak says, "The fire of worldly desires is quenched by the words of God. Let men turn towards Him and enshrine Him in his heart". **(Sri Surjit Singh Sahney)**

92. Ahimsa, the greatest of all virtues

"Never injure any life" is the *summum bonum* for righteous conduct as one of the greatest sages, who had concern for all creation, said in his work – A Guide for Humanity. For him, in fact, all other virtues are less important and can be listed below the principle of "Non-killing" or Ahimsa.

Unfortunately, people destroy living beings out of carelessness – while walking or undertaking any activity. A little precaution can certainly save as many lives – those of insects and others. It may be asked why should a person be worried about protecting these small insects since even if they are destroyed no loss would accrue to society. The answer is that since man has no power to resurrect an insect that is dead, he has no authority to take away its life. All scriptures, more particularly the Jain shastras, stress that "life is most precious". It is wrong to advocate that a human being has a right to take away the life of an animal or other smaller helpless creature. If that is so, Acharya Vikram Surishwarji said in his discourse, an identical argument can be advanced on behalf of the animal world that they, too, can take the life of a man. Is man ready to grant this "right" to animals? People should

be vigilant while going about their daily routine not to cause harm to living beings to the extent possible.

A careless throwing away of a burning match sometimes results in a conflagration in which many may perish; a heavy burden on an undernourished animal may cause its extinction; heaps of dirt not removed, may become the breeding place of insects which may be destroyed by man. Saint Thiruvalluvar has denounced the sacrifice of animals in the name of religion. The chapter in Thirukkural on "Ahmsa", reflects the noble sentiments of Jainism.

(Acharya Vikram Surishwarji)

93. Renunciation is a mental exercise

Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are the major religions of India. How to get rid of recurring births has been explained by all the three. According to them, a person goes down by his wicked acts and that birth as man is based on both his good and evil deeds. Acquisition of true knowledge about the cause of getting caught in the cycle of re-appearances in the world, reposing faith in Reality, observance of austerities and pursuit of the path of right conduct are some of the guidelines given by the scriptural authority.

Jainism, which is an ancient religion, believes that the tenets are revealed in every era by Thirthankaras. In the present age, Rishabadeva was the first and Mahavira, the last of such distinguished guides. The religion maintains that renunciation is not merely physical; It is primarily mental. Hence preparation to lead ultimately a spiritual life begins early. Five ethical principles have been prescribed towards this goal, Mahavira has listed them as non-stealing (asteya), celibacy (Brahmacharya) and non-possession (aparigraha). The first among these is considered the most important. Observance of non-violence entails a positive and all-comprehensive view of life. Though an act reckoned as violent is to be avoided, the man's intention should also be pure. The mind should be free from the very thought of acting against ethical conduct. Truth

should be practised by all. Non-stealing signifies absolute contentment with one's possession, not even wanting to take hold of another's. Evil practices in trade and commerce go against this principle. Celibacy in the case of a married man is total faithfulness to his spouse and in the case of an ascetic, complete abstention from the very thought of sex. Non-possession indicates that there should be no desire to obtain more than one's just needs.

To illustrate how outward abandonment is meaningless if one has not controlled oneself, Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji, in a lecture, mentioned the story of a king coming across another ruler, who was in deep meditation, not aware of any event happening around him. Lord Mahavira explained to the former that at that moment, the meditating-king was indeed in hell as his thoughts were about an enemy attacking his territory. After some time, the Lord said the king was now in paradise as he had abandoned all thoughts about his country and that this mind was attuned to God as he saw no real enemy at all. Happiness can be experienced if a person takes to the path of virtue and keeps faith in the teachings of holy men.

(Acharya Rajyash Surishwarji)

94. Thibetan Buddhists 'Mandala'

Buddhist believe that the seed of enlightenment in each person's mind is nourished in the process of visualising and contemplating on a 'Mandala' a circle representing the wheel of time, the universe and the Buddha's enlightened mind. Traditio had it that senior monks being initiated into higher forms of uddhist mysticism are asked to make the mandalas to help them meditate on a particular deity. The mandalas enable them to visualise abstract ideas. Buddhist also believe that the mandala offers spiritual healing to anyone who sees it. A mandala, they say is a storehouse of vast amounts of spiritual energy.

More than one lakh Tibetan Buddhists came to India after the failed uprising in 1959. They are being led by the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of six million Tibetans worldwide who revere him as a living deity. The monks keep their ancient traditions alive at three monasteries in India. Most of their ancient texts were destroyed and the monks rely on the memory of the few elders among them. Each mandala is a sacred mansion of a particular deity, who represents qualities such a compassion and bliss. Detailed instructions on representing each deity are mentioned in ancient Sanskrit texts and in the discourses of the Buddha. The monks after offering prayers to the mandala for four or five days destroy the design to highlight the impermanence of all worldly things.

95. The way of true happiness

Everyone desires happiness, but in pursuing it he does the very things which he should avoid. The result is, naturally, misery and mental unrest. The root cause for this paradoxical situation is that he lacks true knowledge of the Self. Thinking himself to be independent, he acts autocratically and whimsically. Within a limited circle, as for instance in a family, an office or organization, an individual may be the 'controller' and possess immense powers. At the same time, he is also subject to the controller of God. Unless one realises this fact and mould his way of life accordingly, true happiness cannot be attained. Whatever happiness is obtained, if at all, as a result of the efforts made by the temporal powers that he, harnessing science and technology, is at best temporary. "Unlimited and unending happiness is possible only by following the path shown by Lord Krishna", said Sri. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) in a discourse.

The Swami said the human form of life, came to one after numerous births afforded the most precious opportunity to solve the problems posed by the afflictions of disease, decrepitude and death, which nobody liked but yet has to meet with necessarily. The Vedic literature was meant to solve it. In the present day world people had fallen so low that they had neither the time nor the capacity to study and comprehend the Vedanta. Hence emphasis

was laid by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu on chanting the names of God (Nama Sankirtan) which cleansed the soul of the mass impurities that it had acquired over the countless births it had taken. Reciting the Hare Krishna Mantra, leading a simple and pure life an engaging oneself in the services of the Lord, with the consciousness that one belonged to Sri Krishna would ensure eternal bliss. **(Sri. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada)**

96. Siddha Yoga shows the way to inner peace

Man is in the eternal quest for perfection and he tries to achieve this in the content of material life, presuming that a good family, a secure job and such other things will provide it.

However, later he feels he has still not obtained what he expected. This is due to lack of awareness that such perfections can be found within oneself. The spiritual energy that creates supreme fulfillment is available within him. To really develop and enjoy one's gifts and character, one should meditate on the source of all satisfactions – the "Inner Self".

Even though the place is inside oneself, many do not know how to reach there. But the grace-bestowing power of God is in the Guru who can awaken the dormant power (Shakthi) within. After his initiation, commences the fascinating God-ward journey. There will be a feeling of peace within oneself and of the presence of the Divine.

Siddha Yoga, being propagated by Swami Muktananda, aims to kindle the Divine consciousness within the seekers, by means of "Shakti path" and help them to turn the mind inwards. "Meditate on your Self. God Dwells within you" is the core of the message of the Swami's mission.

In an introductory lecture to the Siddha Yoga, Swami Gopalananda, a black American and former Professor of Educational Psycology, who has joined the mission of Swami Muktananda said meditation and chanting are the paths to the inner world.

The compassionate power of the Guru's grace brings everyone in touch with the new level of being. When Siddha Yoga is pracised, one becomes capable of experiencing the Self. The Guru teaches us how to turn our mind inwards, through the process of meditation. Yoga provides a practical technique to realise one's potential in every aspect of life. To find an answer to various problems, one should dive deep within oneself, which will bring one in contact with the eternal source of bliss. The source is the Self.

The glory of Siddha Yoga lies in its naturalness and spontaneity. The outlook of the seeker, whose inner being through the Guru's grace is unfolded, will change after this Yoga and he will develop self-control, discipline and broadmindedness.

(Swami Gopalananda)

97. Problems will vanish if people turn selfless

The essence of all scriptural teachings can be described in brief as "Be good and do good". This ideal can be realized only through adherence to ethical and moral values. The respect for the latter in turn could be cultivated through "Knowledge" (Vidya). These teachings are contained in every religion but there should be some agency to dig them out and present them to the people.

In spite of material comforts, the West seems to need peace and joy. America for instance is wealthy but it is "rich" in diseases. People feel frustrated. Lack of spiritual knowledge and of godly life are the reasons for this mood of dejection. Absence of prayers in schools, the atmosphere in homes not being congenial and stoppage from visiting churches, all make them go in search of tranquility. This peace they temporarily find in drugs as they appear to provide "instant" relief. In recent times, many have taken Yoga, finding it extremely beneficial.

Swami Satchidananda, Founder, Integral Yoga Institute, USA said in a lecture that religious knowledge should primarily enable people to "search within". Such a process of introspection would make them "selfless". Problems would vanish if people turned selfless and got rid of the feelings of "I" and "Mine". Only those with a pure heart can see God. The bible and Patanjali reflect these sentiments because "selflessness" is nothing but Karma Yoga. Religion should educate people about the essential truths. Unfortunately, spiritual knowledge cannot be imparted by academic institutions. One can teach arts and science but the "art of knowing" should be secured only through the spiritual institutions. Truth is one but paths to realise it are many and for this, there should be religious unity.

(Swami Satchidananda).

98. Basaveshwara laid stress on equality

The religious and social conditions which prevailed in India about eight centuries ago demanded the guidance of a bold reformer. Religion at that time ceased to hae relevance to the day-to-day living of the common people. Meaningless rituals were rampant. It was in such a society that Basaveshwara was born around 1131 Ad in Bijapur district.

His parents belonged to an orthodox Saivite Brahmin family. Even as a boy, he was a rebel and left his home and went to Kudala Sangama at the confluence of his spiritual guide, Jataveda Muni, his personality blossomed.

Basavesheara married the daughter of a Minister under King Bijjala of Kalyana. Starting as a clerk in the service of the King, Basaveswara rose to the position of the Chirf Minister through merit and sincerity. Besides being an able administrator for the welfare of people, he ushered in several religious and social reforms. He proclaimed that God is one. He advised people not to waste money over building temples, but to look within, to find God enshrined in oneself.

Basaveshwara emphasized on right conduct, courtesy to common people and service to the downtrodden. "Do not postpone living a good life in this world". He recognised dignity of labour and condemned parasitic existence. "Work is worship; no occupation is high or low; inferior or superior; every job useful to society is entitled to the same respect and regard".

Basaveswara laid stress on liberty, equality and fraternity. To him all were equal irrespective of caste, creed, sex, occupation and wealth. His lifelong struggle was to eradicate untouchability and inequality of every kind. Though he was the Chief Minister, he not only visited the area inhabited by untouchable but partook food with them. He encouraged intercaste marriage. Jealous of position, achievements and popularity, orthodox and traditional persons joined together and complained to King Bijjala that he was upsetting the established social order and thereby causing an upheaval in the kingdom. On such pressure, the King wanted to annul intercaste marriage and punish severely the parents of such spouses. Protesting against this unjust decision, Basaveswara relinquished his office as Chief Minister. He left Kalyana and went to his spiritual mentor who was on his deathbed. Some time thereafter Basveswara attained samadhi. His perennial philosophy of life has universal appeal and his teachings are valid even today. **(D.M. Chandrasekhar)**

99. Method of developing self-confidence

The human body can be compared to a temple, with God seated within. Hence all that we do are at His command and we should undertake to carry out only pious deeds which will please Him. Everyone should be treated with utmost kindness. To be born as a human being itself should be considered as a rare privilege conferred by God and hence such a golden opportunity should never be wasted.

Worship of God will naturally provide the solace needed for a tormented soul. Obstacles are also bound to crop when a person is desirous of approaching God but they can be surmounted with self-confidence. Divine service should first be carried out as

Anjaneya did, several guidelines have been provided to lead a virtuous life and these ought to be followed sincerely.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba in a discourse said that people usually seek Divine assistance only when confronted by problems. Development of self confidence will provide a man the strength to face them. It is necessary to equip oneself with spiritual wisdom – not academic or text-book knowledge. The spirit of enquiry should also be cultivated.

Another important injunction that should never be violated is to avoid wastage of food. It is a crime to do so. A tale familiar about Saint Thiruvalluvar who was in the habit of placing a needle and a cup of water by the side of the leaf in which he used to take his lunch. For a long time, his wife who had faithfully served him did not ask the purpose of these items but the Saint told her that should she on any occasion cause a particle of rice to spill, he wanted to pick it up with the sharp tip of the needle and wash it in the cup but there was no need for it for she was extremely careful and did her job with fervour. The second important lesson to be learnt is not to waste Time which is precious. The third command relates to spending money. Neber should a person throw it away or misuse it just because he has plenty to spare. Desires should be curbed and anger carefully controlled. God is Love and everyone should allot a few minutes daily to retain God's forms in the mind. Our prayers should be "Let the entire humanity be happy. Let us all get salvation." **(Sri Sathya Sai Baba)**

100. The Roots of Religions

The life story of Buddha evokes in us peace, compassion and bliss. The innumerable images of the Buddha found in all parts of the country also produce in us the triple effect of peace, compassion and bliss. Somehow an impression has gained that Buddhism stood for atheism. We were also told by some historians that this religion was driven out of India. But the numerous Buddhist works in Sanskrit and Pali, and the Asokan edicts have revealed to us the nobility of the Awakened One (the Buddha) and have filled us with pride that this great soul was born in India. Edwin Arnold has sung the glory of the Buddha in his composition,

Light of Asia. At one time, this religion had spread in Tamil Nadu also, and, as a result, we find Buddhist doctrines incorporated in several Tamil works of those days. When our hearts are filled with great respect for this religion, we may wonder why such a good religion is said to have been "driven out" of our country.

When we view events in retrospect, we find so far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, Jainism was much more popular than Buddhism. Tamil literature abounds in works dealings with Jainism and in works by Jain authors. Jainism has also a good hold on people in Gujarat and in certain other parts of North India. Both Buddhism and Jainism proclaimed Ahimsa as their cardinal principle. Buddhists were not so uncompromisingly committed to Ahimsa as Jains, and had no scruples in eating the flesh of animals killed by others. The good support Jainism had in this country is evidenced by the numerous statues and images pertaining to that religion in several places.

Sankhya is another great and ancient religion of this land. This religion has produced more ascetics and jnanis than Buddhism or Jainism. Yet, we find neither images in honour of those ascetics and jnanis, nor an abundant literature in the form of songs and stories. However, we find more reference to Sankhya than to either Buddhism or Jainism in philosophical works.

Saiva and Vaishnava Siddhantas are two other forms of the Vedic religion which are current among us in the South.Vaishnava Siddhanta expressed itself through the teachings of Sri Madhwa and Sri Ramanuja. The Vaishnavism of Sri Ramanuja and the Saivism of the Saiva Siddhanta school, have each a large following in Tamil nadu. In every Vaishnavite temple, we see installed the images of Sri Ramanuja, Nammalwar, Manavala Mamunigal, Vedanta Desika and other Alwars. Similarly, in Saivite temples, we have the images of Appar, Sundarar, Manickavasagar and other saints. The more important Siva temples have the image of all the sixty-three Nayanmars.

Temple inscriptions refer to gifts of landed property for conducting recitations of Vaishnava Prabandhaas and Saiva

Tirumurais. Coming to Advaita, we do not find for Sri Adi Sankara, even thousandth of the number of images that exist for Vaishnavite and Saivite saints. There are no images at all for Sri Sureswaracharya and Sri Appaya Dikshitar, two great exponents of Advaita after Sri Sankara Bhagavadpada. A high officer of the Archeological Department once told me that if history is reconstructed only with the aid of inscription, images and other archeological materials, there may not be any reference either to Sri Sankara or to Advaita.

It is to be noted that the founder of each religion criticised the religion that was in vogue in his time and which he sought to replace by his own religion. Buddhism criticised the Vedic religion, Jainism criticised Buddhism and so on. Each of these religions, including Vaishnavism of Sri Ramanuja and Saivam of Saiva Siddhanta, has a distinct feature of its own.. There are also points of differences between one religion and another. Even in a matter like idol worship, on which both Vaishnavism and Saivam agree, the former insists on, worship pf the form in which God is conceived, while the latter is satisfied with the worship of a symbol, like the Linga. Christianity and Islam inveigh against idol worship, as also the Arya Samajists. While Hinduism is based on the Vedas, both Buddhism and Jainism revolted against the Vedas. Each of these religions teachers, in his time, gathered around him a huge following.

When we survey the position of religions at the present time, we find that nearly half the world's population professes Christianity and almost an equal number, Buddhism. The population not covered by these two religions follow the other religions. Several religions have risen and fallen in this world and some of them have practically disappeared. How did they rise and why did they fall, is an interesting question. Ecah religion, as it arose, claimed the monopoly of Truth and proclaimed that it alone was the last world in true religion. Truth is only one; there cannot be two Truths. Yet, each religious leader was able to be judged from the number of people claiming allegiance to a particular religious system? If so how did it come about that a number of

religions claiming monopoly for Truth, and which in their time commanded a large following, ceased to be popular.

This gives rise to a number of other questions. Is a religion popular because it it true, or is it true because it is popular? Did people embrace a religion because it is true or did a religion disappear because it was not true? When we ponder over these question, it becomes apparent that the endurance of a movement, or the validity of the views on which that movement is based cannot be judged by the number of its adherents. In our own life time we have seen how Gandhism appealed to thousands of people who were prepared to fast, court imprisonment or die at his direction. There were also people who rejected Gandhiji's religious philosophy and were indifferent when he undertook his fasts. We also see the votaries of Gandhism gradually dwindling in number now.

A consideration of all these factors leads one to the inevitable conclusion that a religion does not flourish merely on account of the truth it proclaims. The key to the growth of a religion lies in the cause for its subsequent decay. In Mattavilaasa, written by King Mahendra Varma, who is responsible for the rock-cut temples at Mamallapuram and other places, there is a reference to the licentious habits of the Buddhists bhikkus of his day and to their swerving from the high code of personal conduct laid down for them. The Buddha himself, when admitting women to his order of bhikkus, foresaw the inherent danger of having both men and women in the order. The decline of Buddhism was therefore, due to the failure of its adherents, particularly those who have to set an example for others, to rigorously adhere to the precepts of that religion. Conversely, a religion will continue to flourish if it can claim among its adherents, particularly those who, by their personal example, are charged with the propagation and preservation of that religion, men of high spiritual attainments, with a large heart and without any blemish in their character.

While the initial impetus to any religion is given by its high-souled founder, its subsequent strength and popularity depend on the fervour, devotion, discipline and purity of succeeding